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Arts Mixtape

FORGET SPARK NOTES, TAKE YOUR KIDS TO "A FOR ADULTERY" by Jarrett Lyons



Leandra Ramm and Reyna Whitty as Mother/Daughter pair Hester and Pearl. Photo by Adele Bossard

Literary History buffs unite! "A for Adultery," an unusual version of "The Scarlet Letter," will be presented at the Little Time Square Theatre of Roy Arias Studios and Theaters September 14 to 30, 2012. It's unusual in that, in our age of postmodernism, this is a musical that is actually quite faithful to the Nathaniel Hawthorne classic.

Writer/composer Paul Dick is known for faithfully adapting classics, with past success in the genre with "Wuthering Heights, a Romantic Musical" which was said to "demolish the myth that musicals with a literary source always dilute their origins" (Deirdre Donovan, Theatrescene.net). Mr. Dick's last produced work, "Moses, My Love," was an "honest adaptation of the Exodus story."

When looking to adapt musicals, Mr. Dick is particular. To begin with, he searches for human interest stories that can really get down to the core of his audience. He's not one to take the "Will Rogers Follies" approach to musicals, with big flashy numbers overpowering the emotional foundation of a piece. When deciding on a story to work with, Mr. Dick looks for a story whereby the characters are original with original problems that still allow the audience to relate to the emotions of the musical. He prides himself in dealing with extraordinary characters. Extraordinary love stories in particular get his creative juices flowing. "I take people who have vital problems that

I can relate to personally," Mr. Dick elaborates.

Mr. Dick started "A for Adultery" when he was participating in the BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop. While writing a song for The Scarlet Letter's antagonist Roger Chillingworth about his taking young Hester Prynne as a wife and trying to make "a habitation a home," he felt he had "struck gold." After substantial positive feedback from other members of the workshop, he decided to develop the musical by examining and working with the rest of the story and characters.

If anything lends "A for Adultery" to updating of the original classic, it's the creative use of music. Essentially the music is there to build the story and connect the audience to the emotions of the characters. The piece is dramatized in an operatic style. Music Director is Rebecca Greenstein, who is music director at the award winning "Kidz Theater," has added flavor to the show by arranging the music in interesting ways. Her arrangements in "A for Adultery" include a tango number and a big "classic Broadway" number.

Director Marlene Thorn Taber worked with Mr. Dick last season on "Moses, My Love" and calls herself the "most appropriate director" because of the strong working relationship that she and Mr. Dick forged when it came to bringing his work to the stage. Taber is a former Broadway performer and a director with international credits. She knew that she and Mr. Dick would work together again by the time "Moses, My Love," completed its run last year.

Because she had never been exposed to the source material before beginning pre-production work, Taber says she was able to stage a production with no preconceived notions and solely rely on the faithful book by Mr. Dick. Her secret? "Almost everyone I met had read the novel and I didn't, so my perspective was pretty fresh." She aims to keep the action fast paced and streamlined. Though the relationship to the source material differed among production staff members, they had the same goal in mind.

Taber reflects, "I would like people to think they could still relate to a historical piece. I like working close to the audience, to see the human nature in the characters so that they might relate."

She adds, "One reason audiences come to the show is because they know and like the novel. They want to see a depiction of the story. By being true and respectful to Hawthorne's tale, we encourage audience appreciation and avoid antagonizing them, even though Paul has added his own 'bent' to the tale."

Spark Notes with music? Now there's a business idea!



Reverend Dimmesdale (John Rice) and Hester (Leandra Ramm) in privacy. Photo by Joseph Urlick.



Reverend Dimmesdale (John Rice) with Hester (Leandra Ramm) and Pearl (Reyna Whitty) on the gallows. Photo by Joseph Urlick



Drew Martin as Roger Chillingworth and John Rice as Reverend Dimmesdale.

IF YOU PLAN TO GO:

September 14 to 30, 2012

Little Times Square Theatre (of Roy Arias Studios & Theaters), 300 W 43rd Street, 4 floor.

Presented by Passajj Productions

Tickets \$18 general admission; \$10 students with ID, TDF accepted

Box office Ticket Central 212-279-4200 /www.ticketcentral.com

Wednesdays through Fridays at 8:00 pm; Saturdays at 3:00 and 8:00 pm; Sundays at 3:00 pm

Recommended for ages 14 and up.



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