

Review: 'Frogz'

San Antonio Express-News

Posted on November 8, 2014

By Jasmina Wellinghoff

"And now the Imago Theater's 'Frogz!'" proclaimed an unseen announcer in the darkened theater. A moment later the stage lights came up on three huge frogs standing motionless, staring at us. That went on for a minute or two, then one moved slightly, then another, then all three hopped around, leapt and flipped their hind legs into the air and eventually piled up on top of each other. By this time, the kids in the audience were giggling, the adults were smiling and everyone was ready to sit back and enjoy the fun.

Presented by Arts San Antonio Friday (Nov.7) at the Charline McCombs Empire Theatre, "Frogz" is the kind of show that's probably best enjoyed with a child in tow. Its 11 cleverly conceived and perfectly executed vignettes speak to a child's idea of what's funny through a combination of movement theatrics, puppetry, illusion, a few special effects and a good dose of goofiness.

The children in the audience responded the most to "Penguins," which featured five performers dressed in realistic-looking penguin costumes, complete with facial masks, and engaging in a game of musical chairs. Just watching these creatures waddle about was chuckle-inducing but their body language toward each other was most amusing when it mimicked human behavior. As the game progressed and individual penguins took their chairs with them and left, the lone fellow left on stage eyed the seat of an audience member, who may or may not have been a prearranged volunteer. If he wasn't, he sure went with the flow like a pro, ending up with a penguin in his lap.

Other entertaining segments featured a huge paper bag with a cat stuck inside; slinky-type accordion structures confronting each other and moving about with amazing expressiveness, and a giant baby in a weird game with "orbs." Like the paper bag, and other objects in the show, the orbs changed shapes as they rolled around, pushed the baby and rolled over him, and eventually slithered menacingly over the edge of the stage and stole a child's shoe.

In terms of illusion, the most interesting bit was a vignette called "Larvabatic" in which a performer costumed to look like a caterpillar-type bug appeared to be engaging in difficult acrobatic feats with his tubular lower body while supporting himself on his arms that were made to look like the creature's forelegs... until you realize the "arms" are actually the man's legs and he's really not doing anything too challenging. The clever costume was part of the trick.

According to program bios, the five performers - Kyle Delamarter, Jonathan Godsey, Kaician Jade Kitko, Pratik Motwani and Tera Nova Zarra - all had training in various highly physical disciplines such as acrobatics, aerial dancing, physical theater, trapeze work, etc. But surely, they must have developed brand new skills for this production, allowing them to hide inside and animate the animals and objects that populate "Frogz."

The show was created by Portland, Oregon-based Imago Theater co-founders Jerry Mouawad and Carol Triffle who both studied with French mime and physical theater teacher Jacques Lecoq.

"Frogz" ended on a philosophical note of sorts with "Paper," a segment that opened with red-clad, masked humans clashing and unmasking each other by smashing paper screens over each other's heads. Once they lost their masks, however, they all underwent a transformation into more angelic beings.

Hey, masks can't be all bad. Without them, this show wouldn't be half as much fun.