

playroom to the Grand City of social relationships, help a person open it from the inside.

Because of the way they relate to their audiences and the kind of experience they offer, *Shortshrift*, *The Copetown City Kite Crisis*, and *Sarah's Play* are significant works in the literature of a serious theatre for children.

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The Good Versus the Bad

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Ready Steady Go, Sandra Jones, Playwrights Co-op, 1975. 40 pp. \$2.00.

Pickles and Puppets, Noreen Young and Juli Voyer with music and lyrics by Wyn Canty. Playwrights Co-op, 1974. 44 pp. \$2.50.

In most children's plays, and indeed in many plays in general, there is a villain and a hero and the plot revolves around the subsequent encounters; usually the 'good guy' wins and all ends well. Two plays now on the market, *Ready Steady Go* and *Pickles and Puppets* are no exception. In fact, they are predictably predictable.

Both plays have stock characters, albeit funny and memorable, who work or fumble their way through a series of incidents that puts them to the test. Tension increases as the plays reach their climax and then comes the denouement. But, though the characters are stock and the outcomes predictable, both plays are successful in that they are lively, colourful, light-hearted, and absorbing. And, all-in-all, is that not what matters? Compared with other plays on the market, whether American or Canadian, these two fare favourably.

Ready Steady Go was first produced by Cameo Productions at the Calgary Stampede's Flare Square in the summer of 1973. The hero is Ready Steady, "a kind-hearted but shy Mountie who dreams of being a hero". At his side is Ramona, a horse both intelligent and sarcastic; there is also Miss Mumbles, a vain doll concerned with the cracks on her face; and Scrumptious, the "foolish, noisy, completely lovable bear". Ready Steady goes on his inspection round with Ramona, while Scrumptious, very eager to be of assistance, is assigned to

guard the ladies—Vanilla, Sasparilla, Laevinia and Marie. Each has her distinguishing character traits: Vanilla, “who is much concerned with manners and etiquette”, Sasparilla, “who loves to eat and gossip”, Laevinia, “who considers herself an adorable flirt”, and Marie, “who leans towards dictatorship”. Three miserable, ingratiating packrats enter the scene, one smart, one nasty, and one who is not too bright. This upsets the comfortable arrangement and things start happening. Oh yes, there is also Derek, a song-writing spider who is a narrator of sorts, or a commentator.

Ramona, the horse, is a female; she is also the freshest, least trite character—one who is very quick with her puns, any of which could be missed by younger children. Scrumptious is a lovable bear, and the ladies, Vanilla, Sasparilla, Laevinia, Marie, and Miss Mumbles the doll, are the weakest characters. They are too predictable and too stereotyped.

Sandra Jones describes herself as “stubborn, single-minded, erratic, vulnerable, silly and honest.” That description fits many of her characters in *Ready Steady Go* as well.

Pickles and Puppets is the creation of several people: one is an Ottawa freelance puppeteer and puppet creator, one is a freelance writer of television scripts, and one is a piano teacher. In this play, the good guys are Henry Pickles and P.J. Pickles, puppeteer brothers, and their puppets who come to life, as well as other helpers along the way. The villain is Prunella Squelch, military, starched, straightlaced and formidable; she and her sister, Gloxinia, are taking twelve captive convicted children to be de-giggled. Now where would twelve children be de-giggled? At Gloomydroop’s, of course. Gloomydroop is a mysterious master of change with a witch-doctor-like appearance. (One word of mild caution may be necessary. Gloomydroop may be scary for two-to-five year olds, which is younger than a suitable age for this play in any case.) The play is full of things happening, with colourful characters all around, and it incorporates good audience involvement, both directly and indirectly. The character names are delightful and original, and for the most part so are the characters. The main characters are strong, and the contrast between villain and hero is definite.

Too many children today are not only weaned on television, but also receive excessive doses of it right through their growing-up years. Too many children grow up not knowing how to respond to live theatre and the pleasures that it can bring. Thus, the more plays that are written and produced for children of all ages, perhaps the more children would attend ‘real live plays’. There is nothing that can match the excitement and tension and often pure entertainment of live theatre. In light of this, it is encouraging to see these two plays on the market, both having been successfully produced at least once, and both available from the Playwrights Co-op.

Both plays could be produced as simply or as elaborately as desired. *Pickles and Puppets* lists some rather involved sets and props, but I am sure

this could be overcome. Some of the most successful drama is done with imaginary and symbolic costumes and sets. Children can and should be encouraged to use their own imaginations.

What age group would enjoy these plays? I would say six-years-old and up. *Pickles and Puppets* is the rowdier play with more going on, while *Ready Steady Go* has less lively characters, and both end "happily ever after".

Corny, snappy and catchy lyrics are sprinkled throughout both plays and add a fun dimension. They are not very sophisticated, but they have the same rhythmical catchiness as some of Dennis Lee's lyrics. At least this is true of *Pickles and Puppets*; *Ready Steady Go* is more corny, verging on schmaltz and Disneyland aura.

If the two plays are discussed together in this review, it is because of the surprising similarity of their general tone, age-group suitability, character delineation and predictable plots. Does one overshadow the other as being more original, more fast-paced, more adventuresome and more absorbing? Yes, *Pickles and Puppets* is the superior play.

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