

times; the 12-year-olds are not given enough credit for their ability to function beyond a superficial level. Yes, Shannon does come to a revelation in the end and accepts responsibility for herself, but it would have been more interesting to explore her inner feelings, rather than simply witness the external behaviour which leads to her change.

As a result, the play seems to be overtly moralistic and never fully achieves the emotional impact that the subject warrants. It is, however, a useful tool for introducing the concept of disease and acceptance, but the true learning would come in additional research and effective reflection on the characters' complex network of behavioral motivations.

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CANADA THEN, CANADA NOW

Barnardo kids. Janice Wiseman. Words and music, James Gordon. Copsycript. Distributed by Playwrights Union of Canada. 23 pp., \$5.00. [First produced: Grande Theatre Project, Ontario, 1985]; **Not so dumb.** John Lazarus. Copsycript. Distributed by Playwrights Union of Canada. 43 pp., \$5.00. [First produced: Green Thumb Theatre for Young People, B.C., 1984]; **Night light.** John Lazarus. Copsycript. Distributed by Playwrights Union of Canada. 39 pp., \$5.00. [First produced: Green Thumb Theatre for Young People, B.C., 1987].

Barnardo kids is a fascinating blend of Canadian and British history with music and drama that results in a delightful sincere look at vignettes of life in early Canada.

A small cast plays multiple roles on a sparse stage tracing the background of orphaned children abandoned in 19th century England, as they become indentured servants in Canada in their attempts to make a new life.

The title comes from Doctor Barnardo, an English medical doctor-cum-preacher who has taken pity on the street arabs of his city. Or has he? The audience is teased and left wondering about Doctor Barnardo's intentions until the end of the play. Mature audiences may be able to parallel evangelists of today with the doctor, a situation which may result in even more thoughtful discussion after the play.

The story begins with voices on a playground, spitefully referring to Eliza-

beth as a "Barnardo brat"; Elizabeth responds, and paints a bleak picture of Doctor Barnardo, a man who promised "undreds of us . . . a wonderful life . . . but he didn't tell the truth, because it isn't wonderful. . ." From that moment, through flashback and multiple character changes, the play swoops and soars through a variety of scenes, building on the horrors of late 19th century England, and the hardships of rural Canada.

Key aspects of the message are presented through the lyrics of James Gordon: the shock of the new land is poignantly expressed in "Why did you send me here?", contrasting beautifully to Doctor Barnardo's apparently snake-oiled promise of a better life in the "Canader song". Well supplied by the good doctor with "The Barnardo box" containing the sundry items needed for survival, why do the Barnardo kids end up "Cold and lonely"?

The sparseness of the set is essential in two ways: it allows for the visual mood of harshness and hardship to develop quickly, and it also allows for the thirteen scene changes for which "Barnardo kids" calls.

Cockney accent and stage directions may present some difficulty but with the right direction, "Barnardo kids" is a marvelous way to bring Canadian history alive.

Two plays by John Lazarus explore fears and insecurities of grade school children. *Not so dumb* is set in an elementary school where threats, violence, and insults serve as background to the theme: learning disabled kids are not stupid, just different.

The setting is a learning disabled classroom, and Mrs. Smith, the "L.D. teacher" is not in when Rocky and Binnie show up for class. Binnie uses one of the classroom's hand puppets, the "Sponge beast", to establish Rocky's disability with reading. Rocky responds with a lion puppet who kills the Sponge beast beating it against the filing cabinet. Rocky and Binnie realize that Mrs. Smith will not be coming to class; she's having her baby. There's no substitute teacher, so Rocky and Binnie decide to "do something": specifically, examine confidential files. The arrival of Victor, a school monitor, temporarily interrupts the scheme. Eventually, Victor reads Rocky's and Binnie's files aloud, much to their discomfort, even though the files offer positive comments such as "good, kind, loyal". The play ends with Rocky telling the whole story to the principal, who naturally understands.

Not so dumb is predictable, and, unfortunately, bothersome. The predictability begins with the character description of Rocky being "sloppily dressed", and ends with his fixing a broken tape recorder.

"Bothersome" includes stereotyping Rocky and Victor, while Binnie is not well-defined. The situation in which the characters are placed is weak, even far-fetched when the characters' ages are given as ten. Subliminally, the vehicle used to show Rocky's strengths says that doing things such as snooping, name-calling, threatening, and hitting are O.K., because "confidential" doesn't really mean that, because everyone gets called names, because threats can be

defused, and because hitting can be lied about.

Not so dumb tries to present the message that learning disabled children are not stupid; it does demonstrate that learning disabled children have different strengths, but Lazarus has chosen an unfortunate scenario by which to present this most important message.

Lazarus succeeds much better with *Night light*, his 1987 work dealing with schoolyard bullies and imaginary monsters. The cast reflects "Not so dumb": Victor is back, and Rocky, though not on stage, is referred to. Yet the predictability found in *Not so dumb* doesn't occur.

Victor is bothered by Farley, a school bully. Victor's younger sister, Tara, is bothered by a monster which lives in the dresser drawer; Tara's fears are exaggerated by the fact that her father is in hospital, a combination which allows Lazarus the construction of a delightful series of events.

Victor is positive that the monster in the dresser is in Tara's mind; Lazarus has created scenes where the only person in the theatre who cannot see the monster is Victor.

Young theatre audiences will ooh, aah, and giggle over the monster; Lazarus has first constructed interactions between Victor and the monster he cannot see, and then between Tara and the monster she can see.

There are some bothersome moments, again dependent upon what may be considered as unnecessarily violent messages. The first occurs with the attempt to destroy the monster by drawing a picture, which is then destroyed by slaps, punches, a poke in the eye, and ultimately, being torn into bits. The monster, seen by Tara and the audience, reacts to each with appropriate mimed actions. Lazarus, to his credit, soothes this violence later, when the monster returns and is befriended by Tara, perhaps suggesting the message that violence isn't the answer.

However, the success of Victor against Farley and the success of Tara against her fears comes through strongly, and even Farley, the school bully who changes his attitude, will win points from the audience as the play ends.

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SCRIPTS FOR ADOLESCENTS

Icetime Carol Bolt. Copyscript. Distributed by Playwrights Union of Canada. 35 pp., \$5.00. [First produced: Theatre On The Move, Ontario, 1988]; **Twelfth inning** David Pody. Copyscript. Distributed by Playwrights Union of Canada. 41 pp., \$5.00. [First produced: Youtheatre, Quebec (n.d.)]; **Not as hard as it seems**. Robert Morgan. Copyscript. Distributed by Playwrights Union of