

StarTribune

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Theater review:

'Reeling' reels 'em in with loads o' laughs

Rohan Preston

January 25, 2006

The Children's Theatre was the site of a Hollywood-style premiere last weekend, with searchlights crisscrossing the sky, flashbulbs going off on a red carpet, and dolled-up hosts and hostesses ushering surprised patrons into the Minneapolis theater.

The Jazz Age-style hubbub was manufactured, of course, but it was in keeping with the pull-out-all-the-stops premiere of "Reeling," Barry Kornhauser's homage to the silent-movie antics of Buster Keaton.

The play is silent only in that the main characters' words are not audible (the clever staging uses surtitles). Otherwise, there's plenty of sound in this entertaining production ably helmed by Peter Brosius. Much of the noise is provided by Joe Chvala as the Foley Artist, the visible, mad-scientist-style person who supplies plinks, boings and other aural coloring that accompany pratfalls and collisions.

In "Reeling," our main character, the Little Fellow (tireless and hardy Dean Holt), is a simple, easygoing guy who is smitten with Beloved (Rebecca Lord as the sighing, dreaming innocent beauty).

He has a hard time finding the ring he has secured for her, but he proposes anyway. Beloved declines. She wants to leave her humdrum life to be in pictures.

Before long, the Little Fellow walks onto the set of a movie where, after making hay of this and that, he's mistaken for the director. The real director, the Big Man (Zach Curtis as a sweaty sort) arrives. Stylized mayhem, Keystone Kop chases, and general guffawing ensue.

Even if you can see some of the jokes coming from a mile away -- and that is often the case -- this silent-movie one-act is still a hoot. You feel for the Little Fellow not because the poor sap is getting hit this way and that, but because actor Holt gives him such a big, innocent spirit.

Physical comedy is all about timing, and they have it down pat in "Reeling," a show pitched at all ages. While the 8-year-old in our party laughed hardest, the three-year-old thought that Holt reminded her of another performer who echoes Buster Keaton -- that loopy clown from "Sesame Street" known as Mr. Noodle.

Ticket infobox for "Reeling"

What: By Barry Kornhauser. Directed by Peter Brosius.

When: 7 p.m. Thu., 7:30 p.m. Fri, 11 a.m. & 2 p.m. Sat., 2 & 5 p.m. Sun. Ends March 4.

Where: Children's Theatre, 2400 3rd Av. S., Mpls.

Review: With spot-on timing, deft physical humor and lots of heart, "Reeling" offers an entertaining homage to the silent-film era.

Tickets: \$13-\$34.
612-874-0400 or
www.childrenstheatre.org

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