

Bird Brain pecks away at the validity of everyday rules

Bird Brain

Written By Vern Thiessen
Directed by Kim Selody
Starring Chris Bullough, Kevin Corey
and Caroline Livingstone
Runs 5-18 March
Citadel Theatre

BEN MACIOROWSKI
AMANDA ASH
Arts & Entertainment Writers

We've all been little rule breakers at some point in our lives or another. Whether it means wandering off of the playground when in elementary school or drinking at a high school dance, testing the regulations instituted by our superiors can become a fun and amusing pastime, especially if you avoid getting caught.

But what happens if you break the rules for a good cause?

In the Citadel Theatre's production of *Bird Brain*, the story surrounds The Woodsman and his struggles with the law. Directed by Kim Selody and adapted by Governor General Award-

winning playwright Vern Thiessen, *Bird Brain* depicts how The Woodsman finds a couple of freezing birds in the forest and agrees to store them under his hat for warmth. In exchange for his hospitality, the birds tell him that they'll clear his mind with their whistling. Bird Brain, as The Woodsman comes to be known, agrees to this pact and returns to his town in order to continue with his daily duties.

However, there's a catch to Bird Brain's situation. In his town, there's a strict etiquette regarding the removal of hats, and when Bird Brain refuses to follow the norm—he doesn't want the birds to fly away—he's labelled as being daffy and loopy, all the while being cast out of town, penniless.

Although *Bird Brain* tells an insightful story to children about the conflicts that can arise between choosing right over wrong, the play isn't without its faults. At one point in the production, there's a festival of fools where three irrelevant stock characters are paraded on stage, one by one, invariably played by Kevin Corey. One such character,



Wordsmith, a multi-dictionary toting scatter-brain, attempts to ground a message into the production by suggesting that to "believe" is somehow linked to individualism and identity. Also, up until the festival of fools where finally some creative lighting tricks were employed, the play lacked innovation, and in a few instances, left the action under-lit. For a children's play set in a mythical land, it's disappointing to see that lighting isn't

better used as an effect.

But the stage is skillfully transformed from a dismal office—comprised of stacked boxes—repetitively rearranged to become the various structures in Bird Brain's world. The three actors also cleverly provide the zany, kid-friendly sound effects for each other with various drums, slide-whistles, clackers and even crumpled paper. However, due to the constant switching and swapping of these

diverse small sound-making devices, inevitable errors (falling bells, dropped sticks, off cues) broke the adept atmosphere of the production.

But where *Bird Brain* lacks in its technical seamlessness and frantic moral grounding, it more than makes up for in imagination and resourcefulness, transforming the stage into a kooky, sound-filled world where the rigidity of rules is shattered when one man refuses to take off his hat.



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