

REVIEWS

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photo by Tom Smith

Lion king: Eric Bishop in "The Wizard of Oz."

THE WIZARD OF OZ

at the Marian Theatre

Reviewed by D.L. King

"Goodbye Yellow Brick Road" winds up somewhere "Over the Rainbow" in the Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts' new and improved version of *The Wizard of Oz*. Director Roger DeLaurier updates the 1939 MGM film script with a nod to the sensibilities of the children of the '90s (as well as their baby boomer parents).

The brilliantly understated set by R. Eric Stone (does this guy ever design a set that's not brilliant?) becomes, with the addition of fantastic lighting effects by Robert Young and wizardly sound design by Eric D. Cronwall, a playground for the imagination. Jeremy Mann's bold musical direction still maintains a note of whimsy, which is matched by the audacious choreography of Carolyn Shouse.

After a rocky beginning in which Elizabeth Stuart rushes her lines to the extent that they are nearly unintelligible, she settles down and delivers a thoroughly modern Dorothy: competent and assured without being overbearing. Her strong singing and confident interpretation satisfies all but the most jaded viewer. Dorothy's nemeses, Almira Gultch and the Wicked Witch of the West, are played with great timing and expression by Allison Watrous.

The trio of Eric Bishop (Cowardly Lion/Zeke), David Nevell (Tin Woodsman/Hickory), and David Huber (Scarecrow/Hunk) are terrific. These guys sing and dance and move so convincingly that I'm not entirely sure they aren't really residents of the Emerald City. Kitty Balay, as Aunt Em and Good Witch Glinda, is both motherly and magical, while Jack Greenman takes on two wholly different personae as a hippie-like Professor Marvel and Wizard of Oz. And the children are fresh and free of over-acting: They delight as Munchkins and Flying Monkeys in out-of-this-world costumes by Judith Ryerson. As Toto, Daniel Gross is cute as can be.

This delightfully crisp and clean production proves to be a treat for all ages, maintaining wonder and awe for the kiddies while throwing in elements meant for the more worldly adult.

"The Wizard of Oz" presented by PCPA at the

Back Stage West, 11/26/98

The Wizard of Oz, PCPA Theaterfest, 1998