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'Honk' celebrates acceptance amidst difficulties

July 6, 2014

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Park. Performances begin at 8:30 p.m.

Bob Compton and courtesy of Theater in the Park

"Honk!" at Theater in the Park

Rating: ★★★★★

The musical adventures of "The Ugly Duckling," splashes down at Shawnee Mission Park's [The Theater in the Park](#) in the musical, "Honk!," that celebrates the theme of acceptance and inclusion in a barnyard of assorted fowl that refrain from looking for beauty within a seemingly malformed duckling.

Acceptance, tolerance, and inclusion are just some of the buzz words people hear every day

but
they
are



Bob Compton and courtesy of Theater in the Park

sometimes a difficult concept to teach to children, but through stories like “The Ugly Duckling” such tolerance can take root in children.

Opening Friday for Fourth of July weekend at Shawnee Mission’s **Theater in the Park**, “Honk!,” sets the time-honored story to music and with a talented creative team, director, and cast definitely entertains young and old alike. “Honk!” continues for one more weekend at the outdoor amphitheater with shows beginning at 8:30 p.m. Patrons are encouraged to bring blankets, lawn chairs, picnics, coolers, bug repellent, and snacks to enjoy the retelling of “The Ugly Duckling.”

“Honk!” tells the Hans Christian Anderson children’s classic of the baby swan who looks and sounds different from the other ducklings in his brood. Because of that, Ugly is an outcast. He is teased, called names, ignored, an outcast, yet, remains confident and devoted to his mother. Only his mother shows him unconditional love.

Ugly makes the mistake of choosing a friend, a tom cat, that befriends him only to win his trust so he can be his dinner. However, Ugly embraces his uniqueness and eventually wins the day.

This story of overcoming prejudice and celebrating differences continues July 6, and then July 9, 10, 11 and 12; gates open at 6:30 p.m. with all performances beginning at 8:30 p.m. The show ends just after 10:30 p.m.

This production is directed by longtime **TTIP** Director Greg Shaw with choreography by Liz Ernst with music direction by Susan Scheibler. Shaw's concept filled the large stage throughout and Ernst's choreography kept the show moving at a rapid and consistent pace. Ernst created a fluid ballet segment for the swans and a spirited tap number for the frogs. Both contrast nicely in the show. Shaw managed a large cast and directed his leads and feature actors to give very spirited performances.

Riley Ewing and Rachel Adcock lead the cast as Ugly and Ida. Ewing is funny and awkward as Ugly while Adcock as his mother sings beautifully and emotes strong motherly vibes throughout the show. Both are wonderful in their parts.

As for the featured actors, kudos go to Omari Collins as the hungry tom cat, the villain of the show, and Patrick Meehan as Bullfrog. Collins moves like a villain as he coaxes and coerces Ugly throughout the show. Collins' voice is powerful and his comedic solos are fun and lively. He can steal the scene if the others onstage with him are not strong in their performances. As for Meehan, he sparkles and shines as Bullfrog. He appears in Act II only and performs a funny song and dance, highlighted by a chorus of tap dancing small "frogs." He steals the stage when he's performing.

Overall, "Honk!" brings family fun to the family-

friendly outdoor venue. The sound and lighting add to the experience, and the costumes—bright and colorful—only enhance the story. The sets and props bring cohesion to the story, and the musical numbers are light, fun, and endearing. The theme, a time-honored tale, works in this musical adaptation. No weaknesses or flaws come to light in the production.

Director Shaw said that he had wanted to present “Honk!” for several years and jumped at the opportunity for this season’s children’s show. His enthusiasm shows in every detail of the production. It’s clear he knew what he wanted to do with the show, how he wanted to fill the stage, and took great care in selecting his creative team.

With only a few performances left, time is running out to grab the kids, grandkids, nephews and nieces for this classic show. Do not miss this opportunity. It’s charming, endearing, entertaining, and worthy of mega-crowds.

Cast of “HONK!”: Rachel Adcock, Ida; Sarah Stoullil, Queenie; Micayla Miller, Lowbutt; Riley Ewing, Ugly; Omari Collins, Cat; Patrick Meehan, Bullfrog; Chris Halford, Drake; Matt Walberg, Greylag; McKenna Shaw, Beaky; Lindsey Hart, Fluff; Lily Logan, Lily; Katie Hulla, Downy; Claudia Mills, Grace; Gabriel Lasley, Turkey; Joy Richardson, Henrietta; Laura Irwin, Maureen; Alicia Templeton, Dot; Madison Cole, Penny; LeAnn Burris, Mother Swan; Monica Sigler, Maggie Pie; Colin Sandall, Father Swan; Monica Sigler, Blizzard Solo Female; Gabriel Lasley, Blizzard Solo Male; Wyatt Walberg, Barnacles; Andrea Strickler, Snowy; Anna Hastings, Pinkfoot; Barnyard Ensemble: LeAnn Burris, Julie Ewing,

Maggie Meyer, Brendan Hulla, Sam Aubuchon, Wyatt Walberg; Frogs/Fish/Geese: Devyn Trandson, Macy Deppe, Megan Nasche, Lily Riddell, Grace Ann Wiley, Sadie Meyer, Lexi Pribyl, Emily Nasche, Emma Mullins, Willa Walberg, Anna Hastings, Jessica Bough, Liz Seacrest, Megan Secrest, Kelsi Fisher, Lauren Chandler, Morgan Caviar, Savanna Worthington, Bridget Walsh, Maggie Manning, Katherine Noll, Olivia Loepp, Emma Kellogg, Melanie Eszter, Tristan Rios.

TTIP's production of "Honk!" is partnering with Reach Out and Read (ROR), Kansas City's only medically-based literacy program. The program works with more than 50 greater Kansas City area healthcare clinics to provide 75,000 books to 29,000 at-risk children and families every year, a spokesman for **TTIP**. Patrons are asked to bring with them to theatre new or gently used children's books to donate to Reach Out and Read. In thanks for their gesture, **TTIP** will provide them with a coupon for free popcorn at the show.

TTIP ticket prices are general admission at only \$8, youth \$6, and children three and under may attend for free (but require a ticket for entrance). To avoid waiting in line, tickets may be purchased online at www.theatreinthepark.org. Tickets may also be purchased at the theatre box office the nights of performance. **TTIP** continues to offer THRIFTY THURSDAY pricing, where patrons can save 20 percent on general admission tickets that are purchased at the box office at the theatre for that Thursday evening's performance only.

The Theatre in the Park is located in Shawnee Mission Park at 7710 Renner Road, in Shawnee, KS. For information on everything happening at **TTIP** this season, please visit www.theatreinthepark.org.

SUGGESTED LINKS

- **Holiday fun begins in Shawnee Mission Park with 'Honk'**
- **Theater in the Park celebrates July 4 with 'Honk!' opening**
- **New play, 'Master of the Universe' explores PTSD ravages**
- **'Willy Wonka' sweetens evening with 65-member cast of locals**
- **'Chitty Chitty Bang Bang' soars to entertain Kansas City audience**



Bob Evans

Kansas City Performing Arts Examiner