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‘Narnia’ an enchanting journey for families

THINGS TO DO | Dec 20, 2019

By Andrew Alexander, For the AJC

Serenbe Playhouse’s outdoor show is a magical adaptation.

Bundle up and pull on your best winter boots. Serenbe Playhouse is presenting a

charming new version of C.S. Lewis' classic children's story "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," here called simply "Narnia." Like many of Serenbe's productions, the show is set outdoors, and it has the audience following the action through various settings around the Inn at the suburban Chattahoochee Hills development of Serenbe.

Just like blitz-era London where the story opens, the mythical land of Narnia is at war when the four Pevensie children Peter (Barry Westmoreland), Edmund (Brandon Smith), Lucy (Eleanor Rocha) and Susan (Rebekah Larsh) arrive after a mysterious journey through an old wardrobe. In Narnia, the cruel White Witch (Zuri Petteway) has turned the kingdom into an icy, frightened place where it's always winter but never Christmas. She battles against the noble lion Aslan (Benedetto Robisnon), and the children themselves, who are helped along their way by various mythical creatures and end up heroically saving the day in spite of the treachery of one of them tempted by the White Witch.

Dramatist Jules Tasca does a fine job of condensing and dramatizing Lewis' fine fantasy story. The new songs by Ted Drachman and Thomas Tierney are pleasant, if short and sweet, often barely more than a line or two of sung dialogue. The cast members are appealing and have fine singing voices, especially strong when they combine to sing in harmony on group choruses. Unfortunately, on opening weekend, the miked sound was still hitting snags, with enough rustling, crackling and dropping out to be distracting.

Photo: For AJC

The audience follows the action around a field outside the Inn at Serenbe, and the

overall effect is charming, even magical, though the special effects run the gamut. Some, such as the journey through the wardrobe, are absolutely brilliant and enchanting, while others, such as the snow we find on the other side in Narnia (soapy foam spurting half-heartedly through an air blower) are less so.

With the expanse of Serenbe and Chattahoochee Hills just beyond the small setting, things actually end up feeling rather contained: Narnia seems like it could have and should have been much larger, incorporating more of the beautiful natural setting and becoming more of a journey for the audience.

The show has some nice lighting effects that are best seen after dark. (It's worth noting that most shows begin at 7 p.m., at which time audiences can enjoy all the effects; some shows begin at 5 p.m., which will allow audiences to see some of them; and several shows begin at 2 p.m., and these performances won't include that aspect of the show at all).

The show's expansion of the character of the Silver Stag (a compelling Megan O'Dell) — who here becomes a sort of silent narrator, guide and observer of the action — works brilliantly. The opening image of the stag suspended in the air as Winston Churchill's famous "We shall fight on the beaches" speech is heard is the show's most stunningly eerie, inventive and evocative moment. As a story, Lewis' "The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe" is lovely, but as allegory it can be a little dreary and pedantic. The recent film series may have faltered because of those difficulties and due to the challenges of translating the classic literary story into performance. But somehow the play better avoids the pitfalls. "Narnia" is not a perfect show, but in the end, the appeal of its journey and the strength of its

imagined world are irresistible.

THEATER REVIEW

“Narnia”

Through Jan. 12. 7 p.m. Wednesdays-Saturdays; 2 and 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. 10950 Hutchesons Ferry Road, Chattahoochee Hills. 770-463-1110, serenbeplayhouse.com.

Bottom line: A charming version of a classic story that should appeal to kids and adults alike

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