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Arts + Scene » Front Row November 30, 2017

Hail *The Snow Queen*

Dell'Arte's 2017 holiday show melts the hardest hearts

BY PAT BITTON

COURTESY OF DELL'ARTE INTERNATIONAL

Dell'Arte's 37th annual touring production is a delightful take on a familiar story of good triumphing over evil, with plenty of magic and other shenanigans along the way. Director Michael Fields and the cast of third-year students have taken Hans Christian Andersen's original *Snow Queen* story and compressed it down to a little over an hour, excising a few of the darkest elements in favor of some welcome comic relief.



COURTESY OF DELL'ARTE INTERNATIONAL
 Gaia Mencagli frosts it up in *The Snow Queen*.

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The Snow Queen herself (an icily regal and appropriately Danish Gaia Mencagli) sets the scene, clad in a magnificent blue robe with silver accessories so ice-sparkly they'll make you shiver. She summons her trio of trolls (an endearingly bumbling Three Stooges take by Jacob Timmons, Chase Perkins and Gaby Haught) to haul her magic mirror to the top of the mountain so the whole world can see, as she does, how ugly and hateful everything really is. Unfortunately, as the incompetent threesome drags the mirror up the mountain, they are distracted and their precious load shatters into a million pieces. Furious, the queen commands them to gather up every single shard — but two remain hidden, buried somewhere in the snowy fields below.

Enter Gerda (played with a childlike naïveté reminiscent of Pippi Longstocking by Finnish native Matilda Lindström), armed with snowballs. Her target is her best friend Kai (a carefree Eric Jones) but the fun soon takes a darker turn as the last two missing pieces of the mirror, buried deep within seemingly innocent snowballs, pierce Kai's eye and heart. In pursuit of their missing pieces, the trolls arrive on the scene and attempt to shake the shards loose, but to no avail. The hapless Kai is handed over to the Snow Queen and the trolls are left to deal with Gerda.

Optimist that she is, Gerda has other ideas and sets off to find the Snow Queen's palace to save her friend while avoiding the trolls' increasingly inept and desperate attempts to stop her. Along the way, she meets a motley cast of characters who not only direct (and

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sometimes misdirect) her, but also help her to see that she is strong enough in heart and mind to overcome the challenges she faces.

She learns from a chatty tree (an entertainingly snarky Natasha Marshall) that sometimes you have to face your fears to get what you truly want (and that trees give lousy directions). Dodging the trolls, (who are now themselves being pursued by the Snow Queen's army of angry "snow bees"), she finds the Hedge Witch (a delightfully whimsical Fay Steddum), who spends much of her days tending to her plant-child (Jones again). Once again, the trolls try to disrupt the proceedings but are foiled by a giant pair of scissors.

As she nears her destination, Gerda finds herself surrounded by trees apparently addicted to bad puns (they're all just "barking mad") and bumps (literally) into another lost soul, Feely the myopic flying reindeer (Steddum again in a great physical comedy turn with Lindström). While Feely can't see anything without her glasses, she can, with her herd matriarch Frida (Marshall again), help Gerda to see that if she truly wants to save Kai and believes in the beauty of the world, she can do it because she's already come so far. What's more, to rousing cheers from the audience, Feely realizes she has learned something from Gerda: that she can be brave. And when the trolls finally catch up, there's a lesson waiting for them, too.

The stage set, designed by Lynn M. Horrigan, is minimal, as it must be for a touring production, but loses nothing of the magical atmosphere of mountains and snowball fights, forests and the palace of ice. Michael Foster's dramatic lighting complements the set, and the original score, created by the cast members and sound designer Timmy Gray, had the audience happily singing along by the end of the show.

The Snow Queen has been told many times, in many ways, through many media, over the almost two centuries since it was first published. For me, a theater full of adults and children, all totally caught up in the story, is one of the greatest holiday feel-good experiences.

— *The touring production of The Snow Queen plays at the following venues: Dell'Arte International (Nov. 24, 25 at 7:30 p.m.); Orick School (Dec. 1 at 5 p.m.); Lorna Byrne Middle School (Dec. 8 at 7 p.m.); Margaret Keating Elementary School (Dec. 9 at 5 p.m.); McKinleyville High School (Nov. 29 at 7 p.m.); Winema Theater (Nov. 30 at 7:30 p.m.); Eureka Theater (Dec. 2 at 7:30 p.m.); Trinidad Elementary School (Dec. 11 at 7 p.m.); Van Duzer Theatre (Dec. 12 at 7:30 p.m.); Dell'Arte's Carlo Theatre (Dec. 14, 15 and 16 at 7:30 p.m., Dec. 16 & 17 at 2 p.m.); Mateel Community Center (Dec. 6 at 6:30 p.m.). For where to purchase or get free tickets, see the Journal's Calendar, visit www.dellarte.com or call 668-5663.*

Continuing

The musical meta-circus from the '70s that is **Pippin** plays at the North Coast Repertory Theatre in Eureka on Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. through Dec. 9, with a Sunday matinee at 2 p.m. Dec. 3. Call 442-NCRT or visit www.ncrt.net.

Opening

Recycled Youth presents **Showdown in Mudville**, a musical comedy with political parody and dancing, at the Mateel Community Center from Nov. 30-Dec. 3. Call 923-3268 or visit www.mateel.org.

The Arcata Playhouse presents its annual holiday show **The Grasshopper and the Aunt** (we see what you did there) starting Nov. 30 and playing through Dec. 9. Call 825-1575 or visit www.arcataplayhouse.org.



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Waiting for the dark update of Peanuts? Humboldt State University's ***Dog Sees God: Confessions of a Teenage Blockhead*** opens Dec. 1 at Gist Hall Theatre and plays through Dec. 10. Call 826-3928 or visit www2.humboldt.edu/theatre.

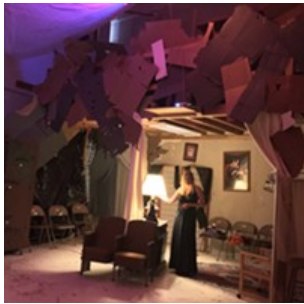
Humboldt Light Opera Company's KidCo takes on the Charles Dickens classic ***A Christmas Carol*** at the Arcata Library on Dec. 2 at 3 p.m. Call 822-5954.

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