

Children's Theatre cooks up a mean 'Grinch'

REVIEW: Spoiler alert: The kid wins in Children's Theatre Company's reprise of the Dr. Seuss musical.

By CHRIS HEWITT | NOVEMBER 13, 2017 — 5:25PM

Chefs tell us that the main thing home cooks can do to enliven a dish is to add a splash of something acidic. That's not bad advice for cooking up a holiday show, either.

The squeeze-of-lemon in "Dr. Seuss's "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" is the title character, a villainous furball in a costume the color of a kale/apple smoothie. In Children's Theatre Company's irresistible adaptation of the classic, the Grinch is played by Reed Sigmund and, just to give you an idea how cherished this supposedly loveless character is, Sigmund's entrance was greeted by applause on opening night.

Sigmund, like the production, takes some cues from the animated TV version of the Seuss tale; he is the only one in Whoville with a British-y accent, for instance, just as the great Boris Karloff was in the holiday staple. But his take on the role is brasher and more dangerous than Karloff's. Sigmund gives the Grinch the aspect of a faded Shakespeare tragedian, a melodramatic outcast who pretends he's too cool to want to belong.

This Grinch is less a "mean one," as he is described in the one song borrowed from the TV version, than an insane one (the other songs are new, but songwriters Timothy Mason and Mel Marvin interpolate familiar carols). It feels like it's his antipsychotic meds that are the thing that's two sizes too small, not his heart.

It's a thing of beauty, this Sigmund performance, and it deepens in contrast to little Cindy-Lou Who, a part that is more crucial in the stage "Grinch" than in other takes.

I've loved the book and TV versions dozens of times, but this is the first production that made me wonder why, when the Grinch is in the midst of stealing Christmas from the Whos and Cindy-Lou wakes up to question his actions, the villain is nonplused.

Everyone's going to know he swiped all the festoonery, anyway, so why doesn't he just bark at her and send her toddling back to her little Who bed, instead of begrudgingly settling down for the chat in which Cindy-Lou helps him understand the spirit of Christmas?

It's because this Cindy-Lou is absolutely a worthy foe for the Grinch. (Spoiler alert, I guess: The truth is that she's even stronger than he is.) And tiny Mabel Weismann, the veteran of CTC's "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" who plays winsome Cindy-Lou without ever getting too winsomey, is a fantastic scene partner for Sigmund. Weismann is a born performer — check out the precision with which she executes Cindy-Lou's heel-toe/heel-toe walk — and she makes it powerfully convincing that this tiny tot's charm offensive could steer the Grinch onto the tinsel-strewn path of holiday cheer.

Despite its omnipresence, "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" is a tough story to get right, as demonstrated by the completely-misses-the-point movie that stars Jim Carrey. But, from its jaunty choreography to its dazzling effects (Scrooge in his sleigh!) to David Kay Mickelsen's perfect, hip-padded costumes, Peter Brosius' staging of "Grinch" gets it exactly, who-liciously right.



(http://stmedia.startribune.com/images/ows_1510608605362)
KAITLIN RANDOLPH

Reed Sigmund plays the Grinch and Mabel Weismann is Cindy-Lou Who in CTC's staging of "Dr. Seuss's How the Grinch Stole Christmas

Who: Book and lyrics by Timothy Mason, music by Mel Marvin. Directed by Peter Brosius.

Where: Children's Theatre Company, 2400 3rd Av. S., Mpls.

When: 7 p.m. Tue.-Fri., 2 & 5 p.m. Sat.-Sun. Ends Jan. 7.

Tickets: \$15-\$90. 612-874-0400, childrenstheatre.org.