

The Charlotte Observer

Review: ‘Grimmz’ awakens old fairy tales with hip life lessons on Charlotte stage

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After its run in Charlotte, “Grimmz Fairy Tales” will be done in Ohio and New Jersey this year and further across America in 2021. JOHN MERRICK *COURTESY OF CHILDRENS THEATRE OF CHARLOTTE*

“Grimmz Fairy Tales” puts the rap in Rapunzel, leaves Cinderella hip-hoppin’ in new shoes, gets Snow White slammin’ and Hansel and Gretel jammin’. Purists might envision the Brothers Grimm pirouetting in their graves at [St. Matthäus Kirhhof Cemetery](#), but I think they’d be grinning rather than groaning.

They edited collections of fairy tales to teach 19th-century German kids how to deal with the perils and responsibilities of life, framing the stories in language readers would understand. More than 200 years later, “Grimmz” serves the same purpose at Children’s Theatre of Charlotte with more hipness and less harshness.

Those who like to see Hansel and Gretel's witch braised in an oven may be let down when she's raised up by lovin' instead. But perhaps that's a more necessary message for the 21st century: We can change presumed enemies with kindness instead of destroying them, and they often turn out to be misunderstood more than malevolent.

Not that story developers Christopher Parks, Rahsheem Shabazz and Ron Lee McGill provide unambiguous endings. Cinderella awakens her father's respect but never learns why her mother abandoned her, or whether mom will take her back. She simply pushes on with life, having enjoyed herself at a citywide dance contest.

Note "enjoyed herself," not "won." None of the four stories ends in some major triumph or revelation of genius or talent. Rapunzel sings like an adenoidal mouse but can't stop, because she loves music. That, as we and her mother learn, is all that matters. Punzie joins a squeaky cellist, a clunky dancer and half-skilled rapper in an impromptu concert full of sound and fury, signifying happiness.

The show doesn't dumb down the hip-hop portions: Composers Kofi Osei Williams and Charles Vincent Burwell deliver serious beats with lyrics that are as intricate as you'd want an elementary schooler to try to absorb. Shabazz and McGill bear the weight of the singing as the narrating Brothers Grimmz and various characters; Isabel Gonzalez, Octavia Hall and Renee Welsh-Noel flow in and out of skits, playing young women who learn confidence or older ones who learn life lessons.

Not a prince can be found, nor do we miss them. Snow White "awakens" to self-awareness, not love, as her "seven shawties" (wizened friends of her grandma) teach her that getting likes on her cellphone's Magic Mirror app matters far less than whether she likes herself. When the diva queen of the Internet poisons Snow's reputation rather than an apple, the girl realizes the approval of strangers means nothing.

The show's teachings can be boiled down to a repeatedly heard refrain: "What ya gonna do when the time comes for you? Will you step up and deliver or just stand there and shiver? Be a taker or a giver? A watcher or a liver?" Six isn't too young an age to start asking yourself that question, and no sentient adult ever stops asking it.

“GRIMMZ FAIRY TALES”

WHEN: Feb. 22-23 and 29 and March 7-8 and 13-15 at 7:30 p.m. Friday, 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. Saturday, 2 and 4 p.m. Sunday. Sensory-friendly performance March 8 at 4 p.m.

WHERE: ImaginOn, 300 E. Seventh St.

RUNNING TIME: 75 minutes without intermission.

TICKETS: \$15.30-\$33.

DETAILS: 704-973-2828 or ctcharlotte.org.

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