

"The Phantom Tollbooth" is a delight for all ages

by Tina Moore
Staff Reporter

"It's a fun fantasy which will appeal to all ages," says Patricia Snoyer, director of "The Phantom Tollbooth," the newest production of Tanglewood Children's Theatre at UNCA.

Snoyer, along with 26 cast members including children from the Asheville community, will present the play Nov. 15-19 at Carol Belk Theatre.

"Both kids and adults will enjoy this play. It has lots of humor and very enjoyable characters. It reminds me of a cross between 'Alice in Wonderland' and 'The Wizard of Oz,'" said Snoyer.

The play is based on the book by Norton Juster in which a young boy, Milo, enters a world of fantasy. He begins his travels when a phantom toll both suddenly appears in his bedroom. He explores such lands as the Sea of Knowledge and the Mountains of Ignorance.

Milo gets himself caught in the war between the Kings of Dictionopolis and Digitopolis (letters and numbers, respectively). He hopes to help solve the conflict between the two kings.

Kimberly McClinton, a UNCA drama major and cast member, feels this play lets her do a variety of things. "I like this play. It's fun playing characters that

are make believe. It teaches kids words and numbers, and it's enjoyable at the same time. It has humor which the adults will enjoy."

The most beneficial experience for McClinton is the chance to work with children. "I always thought this would be a good opportunity for me. There are really some very talented kids in this play. They are slower and they do need more explanation, but as rehearsals went on things just got easier."

Snoyer agreed. "Working with kids is a lot of fun. They often need help with the basics of acting, but they're uninhibited, highly creative and incredibly imaginative. There are a lot of kids in this community who like to act."

Susan Hay, a fifth grade Jones Elementary student, loves the idea of being in a play. "I'm having a good time. Basically I did this for fun. My mom called the drama department, and I went for an audition and got the part."

Several members of the play have multiple parts. Hay has three roles: a merchant, page and demon. "One time I have only 30 seconds to change. It's a challenge to get that done," said Hay.

McClinton is in a similar position playing both a minister in the king's court and a number miner. "I think it's fun. It really teaches children a lesson

without getting preachy. It's entertaining and useful."

Snoyer is in her second year coordinating the responsibilities for Tanglewood. "This is a comprehensive children's theatre program for and with kids. We want the children involved. We want to entertain them at the same time. We even offer workshops in the summer for kids to learn," says Snoyer.

"The Phantom Tollbooth" is the second of six productions this year. The New York Times calls "The Phantom Tollbooth" an "amazing fantasy (that) has something wonderful for anybody old enough to relish the allegorical wisdom of 'Alice in Wonderland' and the pointed whimsy of 'The Wizard of Oz.'"

Snoyer is pleased with this play. "It tells an entertaining and meaningful tale. It gives kids a chance to be in or enjoy the play. I'm excited about it. We've come a long way since rehearsals started six weeks ago."

"The Phantom Tollbooth" will play Carol Belk Theatre Nov. 15-19. Tickets may be purchased in advance by calling 253-5778 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Matinees are set for Saturday and Sunday. Both are at 2:30 p.m. The evening performances are at 8 p.m. with the exception of Sunday night. That show begins at 7:30 p.m.

Review

Mitchell and Ruff play the blues

by Steve Peake
Guest Writer

The only thing missing from The Mitchell-Ruff Duo's appearance at Lipinsky Auditorium last Friday night was this disclaimer: "These men are trained professionals. Don't try this at home."

Willie Ruff and Dwiki Mitchell took legal guardianship of the near-capacity audience from the first note of their first number -- a smokey, rollicking blues progression -- setting the mood for an evening of energetic acoustic jazz.

Mitchell sat relaxed and attentive at the University's Yamaha grand (he usually opts for his own Baldwin) and wasted no time in displaying his mastery of the keyboard. Willie Ruff stood stage left, woofing counterpoint on his well-traveled upright bass. Ruff knocked off his first solo of the evening with such ease that it would have seemed perfunctory had it not worked so well.

Ruff and Mitchell, in fact, work so very well as a team that they've achieved a remarkable milestone -- thirty-five years of continuous collaboration, a record unmatched in the world of jazz. Both men are alumni of vibest Lionel Hampton's big band, among others, so it was no surprise that standards dominated their play list for the evening.

The duo's rendition of "My Favorite Things" owed as much to John Coltrane as it did to composer Richard Rogers. Mitchell and Ruff read the "Sound of

Music" favorite in 3/4 waltz time, allowing a surprising complexity of rhythm. Dwiki Mitchell's solo frolicked at first, but grew increasingly kinetic as both hands blurred in a blistering attack on the keyboard. Asheville's normally staid jazz crowd broke into spontaneous applause as Mitchell passed the solo to Ruff (Mitchell's solos during the evening revealed another arguable claim to renown: He may be the only jazz pianist who groans louder during a solo than the legendary Oscar Peterson).

Willie Ruff traded his bass for the French horn on several selections. He aimed the horn's bell into the sound board of the piano, allowing the horn's rich timbres to sustain and resonate in an eerie beauty that a slew of effects pedals couldn't have bettered.

Ruff eased the pace of the show with a poignant rendition of Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life" and a bittersweet medley from Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess," a medley highlighted by a wistful "Summertime." Mitchell held an appropriately low profile on these numbers, allowing Ruff's notes to linger mournfully in the air.

Ruff kept the audience laughing between songs with his references to local landmarks, remarks delivered tongue firmly in-check. He mentioned area attractions with deadpanned adoration, delighting the crowd while gently lampooning every performer who's blown into a strange town for a one-nighter,

name-dropping local people and places from cue cards somewhere offstage.

Mitchell sparkled on the blues number that opened the second set. His solo grew in ambition, his fingers seeming to stretch a distance wider than the human hand was meant to span. He experimented freely, frankly missing on an idea or two, like Michael Jordan going up for a layup, only to dunk the ball over the top of the backboard instead -- not quite the objective in mind, but no less amazing for the effort.

A standing ovation coaxed the duo back onto the stage for an encore rendition of Ruff's "Shoo-Shoo," ending the evening with an uptempo vamp.

The Mitchell-Ruff Duo gave the impression that they'd be perfectly content to spend another thirty-five years playing colleges and small halls across the country.

They also left the listener sure that these guys really liked each other. It wasn't

hard to picture them an hour after the show, lingering in yet another hotel dining room, criticizing each other's performance with the good-natured ribbing reserved for tight friends.

It was equally obvious that the duo had achieved such longevity for one simple reason: They do what they do better than anyone else. A lot of legends have been born of far less.



Photo courtesy of Tanglewood Theatre

The cabinet ministers of Dictionopolis gather for "The Phantom Tollbooth." Pictured are (L-R) Don Cook, Natalie Reinbold, Kim McClinton, Candace Doerner and Seaneen Murphy.

Fall jazz concert

Staff Reports

This Sunday at 4 p.m. in Lipinsky auditorium, the UNCA Community Jazz Band presents their Fall Concert. The show features music ranging from the big band era to current jazz favorites.

Saxophonist Lloyd Weinberg directs the 18-piece jazz band as they perform standards from jazz greats such as Count Basie, Woody Herman and Duke Ellington. Vocalist Susan Wadopian is the featured soloist.

Some of the selections include "You're Nobody 'Til Somebody Loves You," "Look for the Silver Lining," "I've Got a Crush on You," "How High the Moon" and "Your Sister's Samba." You'll also hear some Latin jazz arrangements.

The UNCA Community Jazz Band is made up of UNCA students and community musicians. Admission is \$2 for students and \$3 for others.

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