

Talking to the animals in a gentle tale at TUTA

THEATER REVIEW: "The Silent Language" at TUTA Studio Theatre ★★½

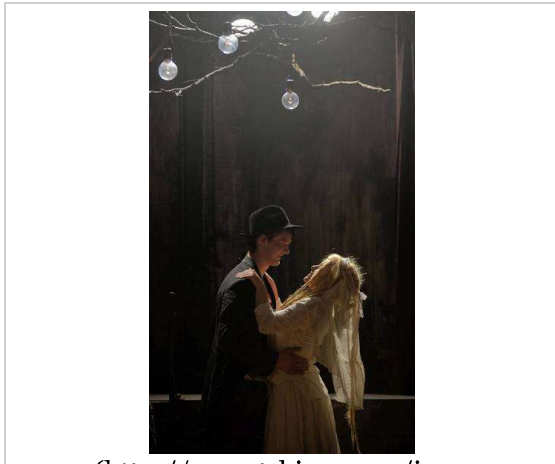
April 22, 2013 | By Kerry Reid, Special to the Tribune

 Recommend 0

 Tweet

New  0

One needn't be an aficionado of Bruno Bettelheim's "The Uses of Enchantment" to know that fairy tales can be a dark ride into "be careful what you wish for" territory. Yet in "The Silent Language," Serbian playwright Miodrag Stanisavljevic's 1981 adaptation of a folk tale from his country now in a U.S. premiere with TUTA Theatre Chicago, even the villains seem, well, adorable.



Several years ago, TUTA provided a boomlet in gritty contemporary Serbian dramas with Ugljesa Sajtinac's "Huddersfield" and Milena Markovic's "Tracks." This current production provides a distinct counterpoint to those downbeat tales of nihilist youths. You should have no fear about bringing the kiddies this time. Yet, despite many inventive flourishes by director Jacqueline Stone and her design team, "The Silent Language" plays it a little too safe and quiet.

Much of the narrative inertia rests with Stanisavljevic's script (translated by Zoran Paunovic), which provides whimsy without stakes as it traces the journey of Poor Gasho (Max Lotspeich), a simple village servant who acquires the ability to hear "the silent language" of the animals. He uses his new gifts to save a princess (Carolyn Molloy) imprisoned by an evil elf. That he chooses the princess over the bricks of gold that Goose and Gander — played with posterior-wagging aplomb by Angela Bullard and Sean Ewert — tell him are buried nearby shows us that despite his humble origins, the guitar-wielding servant is made of noble stuff.

There is a touch of "The Princess Bride's" Westley in Lotspeich's Gasho, as well as a dash of "Androcles and the Lion" — Gasho's habit of using his newly found facility with the silent language to save creatures in distress pays karmic dividends by the end.

But despite the visually delightful designs, particularly Branimira Ivanova's costumes, which favor a sort of steampunk anthropomorphism, there is little that really surprises us in this story. Of course good triumphs over evil in fairy tales, but the best of them require some sacrifice of their heroes and some sense of horror underpinning the fantasy. And surely the powerful gift that Gasho acquires might make him privy to some not-so-comforting observations from the animal kingdom.

Despite these caveats, Stone's staging in the cozy TUTA space pours on the charm. Ewert's Boogeyman provides the closest thing to a creep-out character with his sharp red proboscis, while Aaron Lawson's Elf and Jaimelyn Gray's Ironjaw Hag round out the trifecta of villains working to thwart good-hearted but slightly dimwitted Gasho. Wain Parham's original music provides plenty of ear candy, particularly in a toy-band number for the princess. If you don't mind the slightly out-of-the-way location, "The Silent Language" might be just the show for an offbeat family outing.

ctc-arts@tribune.com (mailto:ctc-arts@tribune.com)

When: Through May 19

Where: TUTA Studio Theatre, 2010 W. Fulton St.

Running time: 1 hour, 35 minutes

Tickets: \$25 at 800-838-3006 or tutato.com

n=referral&utm_content=thumbnails-f:Below Article Thumbnails - Archives:)
n=referral&utm_content=thumbnails-f:Below Article Thumbnails - Archives:)
n=referral&utm_content=thumbnails-f:Below Article Thumbnails - Archives:)
From the Web

(http://www.lonny.com/Tom+Cruise%27s+Colorado+Compound?utm_source=tabo&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=Tabo-LN-US-Desktop-Specials-02&utm_content=tribunedigital-chicagotribune&utm_term=http%3A%2F%2Fwww2.pictures.zimbio.com%2Fmp%2FVK85)

See The Insane \$59 Million Estate Tom Cruise Is Selling
Lonny

(http://www.lonny.com/Tom+Cruise%27s+Colorado+Compound?utm_source=tabo&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=Tabo-LN-US-Desktop-Specials-02&utm_content=tribunedigital-chicagotribune&utm_term=http%3A%2F%2Fwww2.pictures.zimbio.com%2Fmp%2FVK85)
(<https://t.afftrackr.com/?TTT=OdiFsYDdvjqtP%2bn%2bcIZRGXMOJIgbThbkvQJDRoz7h5U%3d&&s1=tribunedigital-chicagotribune-durrrr>)

See Inside the Luxurious Senior Apartments in Chicago
Retirement Home Sponsored Ads