

Central Virginia

BWW Feature: THE PIED PIPER at The Whistle Stop Theatre Company

by Susan Haubenstock Oct. 7, 2019

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Louise Keeton's enthusiasm is contagious. Dressed in a silver-spangled butterfly top, she shares her excitement about The Whistle Stop Theatre Company, the children's theater she founded and works for as artistic director.

"We focus on classic literature and fairy tales," she says of the original adaptations she writes for the group. "What is resonant? What can we adapt for a modern audience?"

Since 2012, when the volunteer group began, Keeton has written all the scripts and directed most of the productions. She says she has received great support from Ashland, where the theater is located.

"I moved here in seventh grade, and the town just embraced me," she recalled. "I wanted to give back. It's an artist colony," she added, and over a hundred locals have volunteered their talents over the years, creating costumes and props, providing music and backstage support, and making the Ashland Theatre auditorium available to the group.

"Theater can have a lot of power," Keeton said. "I want to share that with the next generation, to empower them." Her version of the Cinderella story, for example, doesn't show a helpless girl waiting around to be saved, but rather focuses on the newest fairy godmother, who puts a lot of thought and effort into getting Cinderella ready for the ball. And that play, "Cinderella: The Fairy Godmother's Tale," went to the New York Children's Theatre Festival in 2014, supported by a Kickstarter fund. Other shows have included Keeton's versions of "The Little Mermaid" and "Beauty and the Beast".

The current offering, "The Pied Piper," features a cast of all ages in a musical version of the story, in verse, with commedia dell'arte touches and original songs. With plenty of participation built in, the children in the audience on opening day stayed engaged through the 45 minutes of the cheerful show, with a curtain time of 10 a.m.

Later this season the company will perform a 10-minute version of "The Gift of the Magi" at Hanover Arts and Activities Center for the Ashland's Light Up the Tracks Holiday Showcase in December, and on June 27, a three-show marathon of "Anne of Green Gables" at the same location for the Ashland Summer Theatre Festival.

The Pied Piper

Suitable for children 3 and older

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The Whistle Stop Theatre Company

At Ashland Theatre, 205 England St.,
Ashland, VA

Through October 13

Tickets \$10-purchase at
whistlestoptheatre.weebly.com

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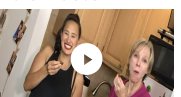
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