



Thursday, February 10, 2005

POWERFUL PLANET

By JON KAPLAN

Rating: **NNNN**

Caveat emptor – let the buyer beware - is a useful lesson for kids as well as their parents.

That comes through in an entertaining fashion in the English-language premiere of **Blue Planet**, based on the novel by award-winning Icelandic author **Andri Snaer Magnason**. The title location is a world where there are no adults and all the children live happily, just as they want. Jolly Goodday, a joke-telling, rockettravelling snake of a salesman enters this Eden. His sales pitch offers the young inhabitants the ability to fly – it only works during the day, so he nails the sun to the sky – and a Teflon-like spray so they don't have to bathe any more.

Heaven for kids, right? Except that in return he asks for their youth. When two of the children, Brimir and Hulda, are accidentally taken to the now-dark side of their planet, they discover the problems Goodday has caused and, when they get back home, their own complicity in the situation. Their problem is how to set things right.

Director **Allen MacInnis**'s fine production leads the characters – and the audience – into a world of theatrical enchantment that's nicely balanced by asking us to think about the effects of our own everyday actions. In **Judith Bowden**'s clever design, which opens the space up to the brick walls, MacInnis has all the stage magic in plain view. That includes technicians helping fly the characters in Peter Pan fashion out over the audience and a multicoloured waterfall run by a pedalled bicycle.

The cast appears to be having as much fun as the audience, who are so caught up in the action that they collectively look up when a character points to a spot high above them. **Audrey Dwyer** brings great energy to Hulda, while we can practically see the lightbulbs of discovery go on above the head of **Paul Dunn**'s boyish Brimir.

The standout, though, is **Kevin Bundy**'s Gleeful Goodday who's full of the bad jokes kids love – of the what's-black-and-white-and-read-all-over variety. He's something of a joke himself until he turns nasty later in the play.

The writing could use some editing – the several lessons learned on the planet's dark side are variations on a single point – and the ending's a bit silly, with Goodday proving unexpectedly naive, but this is a piece that entertains while it instructs. Even older audiences can learn something from the darker, deeper second act, with its message that neither giddy distractions nor band-aid measures are the way to survive in an interconnected world.

BLUE PLANET by Andri Snaer Magnason, translated by Julian d'Aroy and Magnason, directed by Allen MacInnis, with Kevin Bundy, Audrey Dwyer, Jessica Greenberg, Jennifer Villaverde, Paul Dunn, Ryan Field and Clarence Sponagle. Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People (165 Front East). Runs to March 20, Saturday 12:30 and 4 pm, Sunday (except February 13 and March 6), March 14 and 16 at 2 pm. \$19-\$29. 416-862-2222.
Rating: **NNNN**