A Parent’s Review: Seattle Children’s Theatre’s ‘Help’

by Kelly Rogers Flynt



Photo by Chris Bennion.

*Help* is the story of the journey a few young teenagers in Liverpool, England took that led to megastardom and fame. Even more interesting are the stories of the forks in the road along the way. The friendships, the arguments, the musical genius and even the tragedies are all presented as necessary pieces to build the elaborate puzzle that would become the Beatles.

The show is recommended for ages 11 and older. I agree with their assessment, but probably not for the same reasons. The content of the show does include references to drinking alcohol and the untimely death of Lennon’s mother. However, if we excluded all stories where the mother dies, we’d have to get rid of *Finding Nemo*, *Bambi*, *Snow White*, *Cinderella* and half or more of the Disney library.

For me the age factor was more important because the show utilizes flashbacks, changes of costumes on stage so that one actor transforms into a new character multiple times, and other theatrical devices that would be harder for a younger child to follow. That said, there were some younger kids in the audience opening weekend, and they seemed to at least enjoy the music. If you have time to hang around at the end, the actors all come out to the lobby and mingle with the public.

For my 11-year-old son, the mini concert was the best part. Seattle Children’s Theatre provides such an intimate setting, there are no bad seats. And these actors are no slouches when it comes to music. They played the Beatles, straight up, no interpretive renditions, just classic sounds. They were extremely tight musically, more so than some professional bands I’ve seen. I especially enjoyed the scenes where they worked collaboratively on songwriting. You got the feeling of what it’s like to be present when a song is born. I found the conversation between John Lennon and Paul McCartney particularly interesting, as they discussed the value of poetic lyrics versus words grounded in reality.

For hardcore Beatles fans, the show offers many tidbits of insider info and jokes. I got most of them, but had to get my husband to explain a few to me. The purists may be slightly annoyed that McCartney in the show is not left-handed. That was something my son pointed out right away. However, his smug expressions and the careless flips of his hair are so perfectly McCartney-esque that you will soon overlook his non-matching dominant hand. The program includes a crossword puzzle of Beatles trivia. If you can’t answer them all before the show, you should be able to by the end.

Prior to the show I knew very little about Pete Best. I left feeling a little sorry for the guy but at the same time understanding why he wasn’t the piece to fit into the Beatles master puzzle. I found myself thinking of that old Sesame Street song, “One of These Things is Not Like the Others.” Poor ol’ Pete, no matter how hard he hit his drums, he could not pound a square peg into a round hole.

The show *Help* was conceived by Moniek Merkx and written by playwright Jan Veldman. Seattle Children’s Theatre Artistic Director Linda Hartzell saw the show in Holland several years ago and has been working to bring it to Seattle ever since. While the show has been performed in many countries in Europe, this engagement marks the Dutch cast's American premiere and first visit to the United States. Once again, Seattle’s reputation as a music city has paid off in spades.

My guess is that this is only the beginning of a great American tour, for everyone knows you can’t throw a rock without hitting a Beatles fan. Now it’s time for the next generation to learn more about what’s behind the music. Don’t miss your chance to introduce your kids to the Fab Four. The show runs through May 13.