

THEATER

By Alisa NIKOLSKAYA

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL GUTERMAN



Russian Theater of Youth.
2 Teatralnaya Ploshchad.
Metro: Teatralnaya.
Tel: 292-0069.

Children's stories with a message for adults

Giants and Small Fry by Alexander Ponomaryov

One of the more unusual aspects of Russian theater is the idea that a theater production can be subordinated in both direction and playwriting to a single person. Out of all the talented directors specializing in this field, Alexander Ponomaryov is one of the names that first springs to mind, so it is no surprise that his latest work, "Giants and Small Fry" — showing at the Russian Theater of Youth — is a production both notable and unusual in many respects.

In the first place, it is not based on dramaturgy as such. Ponomaryov has devised a two-hour theatrical event that manages to connect a range of poetry written for children, by such diverse authors as Korney Chukovsky, Daniil Harms, Samuil Marshak and Yury Vladimirov. The undertaking might well seem absurd. How on earth could so many different styles of children's verse be welded into a single, logical whole, and furthermore be performed on stage in a production for an adult audience?

But as it turns out, "Giants and Small Fry" is an absolutely convincing example of the precept that nothing is impossible. More to the point, it proves the point that in children's literature, subtexts designated solely for adults are abundantly present. In this case, of course, the adults concerned were brought up on the very same literature in their own childhoods.

The result is that Ponomaryov and his collaborators — composer Stefan Andrusenko and artist Sergei Yakunin — have put together a touching and funny story about how adults mysteriously return to their childhoods and joyfully start behaving like hooligans — playing practical jokes on each other, rediscovering the world and reconsidering the meaning of human relationships. Everything, in fact, that they first learned when they were children. Actors Yury Luchenko, Alexei Blokhin, Natalya Chernyavskaya and Mikhail Politseimako enter into the game with evident relish, transforming themselves into the Fly-Tsokotukha; the villain Tarakanishch; the Dame who has a divan, suitcase and rucksack in her luggage; and the drummer Adrian — among many other figures dreamed-up by children's poets and writers.

A number of people might find Ponomaryov's arbitrary style somewhat convoluted. But, as in all things, once one gets used to it, everything becomes that much more understandable.

The next performance is on Nov. 11.

