

FESTIVAL ANTIGONISH

'has an old-fashioned charm...thoroughly enchanting'



Michelle Langille, Chris Lafleur, Jonathan MacDonald, and Bridget Bezanson (Photo: Marjorie MacHattie)

***Belinda* teaches 'entertaining lessons' with a touch of 'magic'**

By Andrea Nemetz • Halifax Herald • July 23, 2005

If Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince has whetted your appetite for a little more **magic**, check out *Belinda The Bicycle Witch*, a Festival Antigonish Family Series production running to July 29.

Written by Nova Scotian Shelley Thompson, the **lively show** with music and lyrics by Ross Thompson, has **an old-fashioned charm** that delighted an enthusiastic audience in the basement of the church on the St. Francis Xavier campus one recent sunny morning.

In *Belinda's* world, unlike Harry's, magical and non-magical people happily co-exist in a world where magic is everywhere.

The smiling *Belinda* (Antigonish native and Canadian College of Performing Arts grad Michelle Langille) is a modern "Type 2" witch who is not wicked at all, though she does have what her friends see as an annoying habit of uttering all her sentences in the form of rhymes.

Belinda lives in a neat Barbie Princess-pink house with window boxes full of cheerful flowers and a giant heart on the door. She dresses in funky purple vinyl kitten-heeled boots and pointy hat and a rainbow-hued silk coat.

Moxy, her arch nemesis, a self-described "warty-wonder," dresses all in black, including functional low-heeled boots, and lives in a dingy, military green house with a falling down fence and a rusty heap of twisted metal in the yard.

As the story opens, *Belinda* is dismayed to find a bag of mushrooms on her doorstep and suspects it is another nasty surprise from young scalliwag Sam (Chris Lafleur, an Annapolis Valley native making his Festival Antigonish debut).

Before she can investigate, both Sam and the jolly, slightly absent-minded

Mayor (recent Dalhousie theatre grad Jonathan MacDonald) arrive to tell of a tragedy that has befallen their town, Spokesville.

Moxy (classically trained singer Bridget Bezanson who has appeared on the Neptune stage and with Shakespeare by the Sea), apparently upset at the city's refusal of her bicycle license application on the grounds her home is unsightly, has cast a spell that prevents any of the city's bicycles from working.

She promises to lift it on the condition that *Belinda*, whom she dubs "Little Miss Prissy Witch" learn to ride a bike by sunset. *Belinda*, who has been terrified of bikes since an early accident, is bedeviled by a lack of balance. She didn't learn to ride her broom until she was 13 and even then had to have help from two of her mother's crows as "training wings." Still she accepts *Moxy's* challenge.

What follows are **entertaining lessons** about the power and nature of friendship as well as problems caused by making assumptions about people without knowing all the facts.

The songs and accompanying dances have a **Broadway-in-its heyday feel**. Both *Belinda* and *Moxy* bring **heartfelt emotions** to their singing as well as **lovely vocals**, with **first-class accompaniment** by pianist Chantelle Doiron.

There is no time for young audience members to get bored in the fast-paced story which encourages audience participation.

Appropriately enough for a magic themed show, the hour-long production is **thoroughly enchanting**.

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