

live!

What 'The Pianist' says about Roman Polanski

Movie examined whether artists' transgressions should be treated differently. **PAGE 3**



Adrien Brody
in 'The Pianist'

Letterman apologizes

TV host says wife 'horribly hurt' by his admission last week. **PAGE 3**

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THEATER REVIEW "The Hundred Dresses" ★★★½

Your child and the child inside you can relate

Finally, a show meant for kids that's as good as one made for adults

By **Chris Jones**
TRIBUNE CRITIC

With its world premiere of the musical "The Hundred Dresses," based on the 1944 book by Eleanor Estes and featuring new songs by Ralph Covert of "Ralph's World" fame, the Chicago Children's Theatre has finally delivered on its promise to elevate the experience of children's theater in this city. Here's a show that offers the young people of Chicago an experience comparable in ambition, professionalism and, crucially, ambience to the city's established adult institutions.

Better yet, "The Hundred Dresses" is not a remount from Broadway or one of the more established children's theaters, but a fresh and appealing homegrown adaptation of a moving — but not wildly overexposed — work of children's literature. It's the story of Wanda Petronski, a Polish immigrant struggling for acceptance in her small-town schoolhouse, and Mad-

die, a fellow student who comes to understand that some of the worst bullies in the world throw no blows; they just stand by and do nothing.

Do they ever. I could think of a few from my own life to prosecute for accessory-after-the-fact. Halfway through the performance Sunday afternoon, I found myself making a list.

The show's themes are serious — this is, after all, an issue faced by almost every kid in the world. But Wanda's artistic soul and Maddie's inherent decency collectively win over the day. Covert's laudably diverse and melodic score understands that sadness and joyous optimism usually coexist in the life of a child. He has some terrific new songs here — a boppy number called "Dear Wanda," a lovely ballad called "Wanda Petronski Is Missing," a playful comedic number called "Bounce Willy Bounce" and a mournful song called "Passing of Autumn." There's enough here to see that this Disney Channel personality could easily be tapped for Broadway, especially for family-friendly fare.

This unstuffy show, which I'd say is ideal for 6- to 13-year-olds, is

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"The Hundred Dresses" is a musical about an immigrant girl struggling for acceptance. **ABEL URIBE/TRIBUNE PHOTO**



Lauren Patten stars as Wanda Petronski in "The Hundred Dresses." ABEL URIBE/TRIBUNE PHOTO

Both you and your child can relate

Continued from Page 1

directed with zest by Sean Graney. The show is irreverent, funky and Chicago-style, but there's nothing that feels cut back or condescending on the stage. You can't discount the importance of a classy venue like the Royal George Theatre for this company. The kids in the

audience feel (and act) as though they're out on the town, as indeed is the case. Production values are top-drawer. There are even live musicians, hidden somewhere beyond Kevin Depinet's colorful revolving schoolhouse.

The performers are all strong. Lauren Patten taps into Wanda's emotional pain

When: Through Nov. 8

Where: Royal George Theatre, 1641 N. Halsted St

Running time: 1 hour, 20 minutes

Tickets: \$28-38 at 312-988-9000 and chicagochildrenstheatre.org

with striking rapidity. As the main bully of the show, the out-there Natalie Berg (whose prodigiously creepy performance in "Ruthless" at Pheasant Run some years ago lives with me still) goes for the jugular with intimidating force. And Leslie Ann Sheppard, who plays the show's emotional conscience, takes the whole theater along on her journey.

As with most new musicals, there still is work to be done. G. Riley Mills' adaptation (and the rest of the show) seems to run away from the period. I'd bet many of the kids in the theater thought the show was set today, although the show's talk of immigrants and long voyages only makes sense in its era (it reads as condescending otherwise). Moreover, the main theme of the moral cost of staying silent has even more resonance when you consider the date of Estes' book.

Kids can handle history. The show should be clearer. Mills and Graney should also be clearer about whether or not they want kids to talk back to the show — the piece currently approaches the audience in halfhearted fashion. This could go any number of viable ways, but firm choices have to be made. I also think the climactic reveal of Wanda's talents slightly misfires. There is a missing scene that should connect the catharsis of this moment to Maddie's lesson learned: You gotta suck up your courage and get off the fence.

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"The Hundred Dresses" unfolds in all its beauty at the Chicago Children's Theatre, providing lessons about peer pressure and intolerance.

'Hundred Dresses' fits company to a T

REVIEW | Enchanting work for kids, others

BY HEDY WEISS

Theater Critic/hweiss@suntimes.com

The Chicago Children's Theatre might just have its biggest hit to date with its altogether-beguiling world premiere production of "The Hundred Dresses."

The 80-minute show, inspired by Eleanor Estes' 1944 Newberry Honor book, has been exquisitely musicalized by Ralph Covert (creator of the phenomenally successful "Ralph's World" series for Disney), winningly adapted by his co-lyricist G. Riley Mills and set to spinning by Sean Graney, one of the city's most audacious directors, who also clearly has a child's heart tucked in his pocket.

"Dresses" is an enchanting piece of work that has much to say about the ache of intolerance, the power of peer pressure and economic inequality, the nature of bullying and the saving grace of the imagination.

And with the intimate yet spacious mainstage of the Royal George Theatre as the fitting backdrop for what is bound to become a family classic, the full beauty of the show and its wonderfully varied and catchy songs (all happily un-Disneyesque) are ideally showcased.

Set in a U.S. city near the end of World War II (the historical aspects of the story should certainly become part of any classroom or living room followup), the story introduces us to five elementary school students and the new girl with the foreign accent and unfashionable outfit, Wanda Petronski (played with great delicacy and self-possession by Lauren Patten), who joins them for one semester.

Wanda is sadly tormented and ostracized by her classmates, particularly the wealthy, spoiled, pretty and oh-so-self-important Peggy Hawthorne (Natalie Berg is ideally blond, perfect and talented).

But it is Peggy's friend and

'THE HUNDRED DRESSES'

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

When: Through Nov. 8

Where: Chicago Children's Theatre at Royal George Theatre, 1641 N. Halsted

Tickets: \$28-\$38

Phone: (312) 988-9000

acolyte Maddie Martin (the luminous Leslie Ann Sheppard, a genuine "find" whose remarkable singing voice pierces the heart) who is the most important character. For she is the one who senses Wanda's pain and tries, if only tentatively, to reach out to her despite fears of losing Peggy's approval.

When teased, Wanda — the immigrant girl with no money and a dotting, recently widowed Old World father (Kurt Ehrmann) — brags of having a hundred beautiful dresses in her closet. They are dream dresses, but she gives them life in her beautiful drawings.

Along for the ride in this high-energy yet subtly limned show — which can be as goofily comic as it is morally challenging — is a zesty cast of characters. They include Elana Ernst as Cecile, the hilariously overeager dancer; Tyler Ravelson as Willie, the bullied boy who takes refuge in costumes (pirate, cowboy, Superman); Geoff Rice as Jack, the nice boy who triumphs in a contest, and Nadirah Bost as their unflappable teacher.

The score soars thanks to superb musical direction by Andra Velis Simon; musicians Jeff Bouthiette, Nicholas Davio and Eric Engelson, and the lustrous-voiced cast. Tommy Rapley's zesty choreography is ideal. And Kevin Depinet's revolving "little red schoolhouse," and Jacqueline Firkins' classic schoolgirl dresses are, like the show itself, both period perfect and timeless.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CHICAGO CHILDREN'S THEATRE ANNOUNCES 2010-2011 SEASON

2010-2011 season to feature *The Hundred Dresses* by G. Riley Mills and Ralph Covert, and Steven Dietz's world premiere adaptation of Dan Gutman's *Jackie and Me*, directed by Derrick Sanders

CHICAGO, August 12, 2010 — Chicago Children's Theatre (CCT) and Artistic Director Jacqueline Russell are thrilled to announce the company's 2010-2011 season.

Beginning in November 2010, Chicago Children's Theatre will remount their 2009 smash hit musical ***The Hundred Dresses***, written by Ralph Covert and G. Riley Mills, and directed by CCT Artistic Associate Sean Graney. Performances will be at the North Shore Center for the Performing Arts Centre East Theatre, 9501 Skokie Boulevard, Skokie, marking the company's first production in a suburban Chicago venue. Tickets go on sale Wednesday, August 18 at noon. Call the North Shore Center box office, **(847)673-6300** or visit northshorecenter.org for tickets and show times.

In February 2011, CCT will produce the world premiere of ***Jackie and Me***, by Steven Dietz from the novel by Dan Gutman, directed by Jeff Award winner Derrick Sanders. ***Jackie and Me*** tells the story of Jackie Robinson, the courageous athlete who broke baseball's color barrier. Performances are February 8 – March 27, 2011 at Ruth Page Center for the Arts, 1016 North Dearborn Street, Chicago.

Also in February 2011, CCT will return to Millennium Park with ***Red Kite Round Up***, a unique theatrical experience created specifically for children on the autism spectrum and their families and caregivers. This will be the second time the company has produced this full scale multi-sensory exploration for children with autism. ***Red Kite Round Up*** will run from February 1 – 20, 2011 in the Pritzker Pavilion Choral Rehearsal Room in Millennium Park.

More about Chicago Children's Theatre's 2010-2011 season:

The Hundred Dresses

Based on the book by Eleanor Estes

Adapted by G. Riley Mills and Ralph Covert
Directed by Sean Graney
November 3-December 2, 2010
North Shore Center for the Performing Arts, 9501 Skokie Blvd, Skokie
Recommended for children ages 6 and older

Chicago Children's Theatre kicks off its 2010-2011 season with a four-week remount of its smash hit musical, ***The Hundred Dresses***. Based on Eleanor Estes' beloved young adult novel, ***The Hundred Dresses*** tells the story of Wanda Petronski, an imaginative young girl who struggles to fit in with her new American home — and harder yet, her new classmates. Replete with a myriad of colorful and buoyant characters, ***The Hundred Dresses*** is a timeless tale that takes audiences of all ages on an unforgettable journey that explores the bonds of friendship, the willingness to be yourself, and the courage that it takes to stand up to others — even when you're standing alone. *The Chicago Tribune* calls ***The Hundred Dresses*** "a show meant for kids that's as good as one meant for adults."

Sean Graney (*Director*) is an Artistic Associate with CCT. Previous directing credits with the company include ***Honus and Me***, ***Hana's Suitcase***, and ***The Hundred Dresses***. He is the Artistic Director and Founder of The Hypocrites. Sean has directed over 30 productions since 1997. He was a participant in the NEA/TCG Career Development Program for Directors from 2004/6. He has won two Joseph Jefferson Citations for Outstanding Direction for ***Equus*** and ***Machinal***. In 2004, *Chicago Magazine* identified him as Chicago's Best Avant-garde Director. He has also directed ***Edward II*** (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre), ***The Elephant Man*** (Steppenwolf Young Audiences), ***What the Butler Saw*** and ***Mystery of Irma Vep*** (Court Theater). He received a commission from the Goodman Theatre in 2008 to create an original script, ***Without***, which was featured in Goodman's 2008 festival to present readings of new plays.

Performances for ***The Hundred Dresses*** are November 3 through December 2: Wednesday through Friday at 10:30 am, and Saturday and Sunday at 1 pm. Beginning November 16, the weekday performance schedule expands to Tuesday through Friday at 10:30 am. There will be two special 7 pm performances Friday, November 26 and Saturday, November 27, 2010. There will be no performance November 25, 2010, in observance of Thanksgiving. **Press opening is Sunday, November 7, at 1 pm.**

Tickets for ***The Hundred Dresses*** go on sale Wednesday, August 18, 2010 at noon. Tickets are \$26 for children (ages 17 and under) and \$36 for adults. To purchase tickets visit northshorecenter.org or call **(847) 673-6300**. Box office hours are Monday through Friday, 11am-5 pm, Saturdays, 12-5 pm, Sundays, two hours before performance times. Discounted group rates are available through GroupTix by calling **(877) 447-7849** or by visiting **GroupTix.net**.

Jackie and Me

Based on the book by Dan Gutman
Adapted by Steven Dietz
Directed by Derrick Sanders
February 8-March 27, 2011
Ruth Page Center for the Arts, 1016 N. Dearborn Street, Chicago
Recommended for children ages 8 and older

Chicago Children's Theatre continues its 2010-2011 season with the world premiere of **Jackie and Me**, a follow-up to the hit 2007 production of **Honus and Me**. Jeff Award winner Derrick Sanders will direct. In **Jackie and Me**, from Dan Gutman's popular Baseball Adventure Series, Joey Stoshack has to write a report on an African American who's made an important contribution to society. Using his special ability, Joe decides to go back to meet one of history's greatest baseball players, Jackie Robinson, the man who broke baseball's color barrier. Joe plans on writing a prize-winning report, but he doesn't plan on a trip that will forever change his view of history and his definition of courage.

Derrick Sanders' (Director) recent credits include *Jitney*, *Elmina's Kitchen* and *Stick Fly* with True Colors Theatre in Atlanta, *Top Dog/Under Dog* and *Five Fingers of Funk* at Minneapolis Children's Theatre, *August Wilson's 20th Century Cycle* at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., *Joe Turners Come and Gone* at Center Stage, his Off – Broadway debut *King Hedley II* for Signature Theatre, for which he received two Lucille Lortel and Audelco nominations. His production of *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* received three Jeff Award nominations. He staged the world premiere of the Jeff Nominated *Deep Azure* and the BTAA, Black Excellence and Jeff Award winning production of *Seven Guitars*. He was also a part of August Wilson's World premiere productions of *Radio Golf* and *Gem of the Ocean* on Broadway and at the Huntington Theatre, Mark Taper Forum and the Goodman. Sanders was the Founding Artistic Director of Congo Square Theatre Company. He was named a *Chicago Tribune* Chicagoan of the Year: Theater in 2005. He received his training from Howard University (B.F.A) and the University of Pittsburgh (M.F.A).

Steven Dietz (Playwright) is one of America's most widely-produced and published contemporary playwrights. Since 1983, his twenty-plus plays have been seen at over one hundred regional theatres in the United States, as well as Off-Broadway. International productions have been seen in England, Japan, Germany, France, Australia, Sweden, Austria, Russia, Slovenia, Argentina, Peru, Singapore and South Africa. His work has been translated into seven languages. Mr. Dietz is a two-time winner of the Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays Award, for *Fiction* (produced Off-Broadway by the Roundabout Theatre Company), and *Still Life With Iris*. He received the PEN USA West Award in Drama for *Lonely Planet*, the 2007 Edgar Award for Drama from the Mystery Writer's of America for his widely-produced *Sherlock Holmes: The Final Adventure* (adapted from William Gillette and Arthur Conan Doyle); and the 1995 Yomhuri Shimbun Award (the Japanese "Tony") for his adaptation of Shusaku Endo's novel *Silence*. Other widely produced plays include *Inventing Van Gogh*, *God's Country*, *Private Eyes*, *The Nine Variations*, *Trust*, *Rocket Man*, *Halcyon Days*, *Ten November*, and *More Fun Than Bowling*. Other award-winning stage adaptations include *Force of Nature* (from Goethe), *Over the Moon* (from P.G. Wodehouse), *The Rememberer* (from Joyce Simmons Cheeka), *Paragon Springs* (from Ibsen), *Dracula* (from Bram Stoker), and, with Allison Gregory, *Go, Dog, Go!* (from P.D. Eastman).

Previews of **Jackie and Me** are January 28 and 29 at 10 am and noon. Regular performances begin Sunday, January 30 at 12 pm and 3 pm, continuing Tuesday through Friday at 10 am and noon, and Saturdays at 11 am. Beginning March 5, Saturday performances are at 12 pm and 3 pm. Special Sunday matinee performances are March 5 at 10 am and noon, and March 20 at noon. **Press opening is Friday, February 11 at 7 pm.**

Ticket prices for *Jackie and Me* are \$25 for children (ages 17 and under) and \$35 for adults. Tickets will be available through CCT's website, chicagochildrenstheatre.org, or call the ticket hotline, **(866) 811-4111**. Hotline hours are 8 am-8 pm, Monday through Friday, 9 am-5 pm, Saturday and Sunday. Group rates are available through GroupTix by calling **(877) 447-7849** or by visiting GroupTix.net.

Red Kite Round Up

Written and directed by Jacqueline Russell

February 1- February 20, 2011

For children with autism ages 6 and up

In *Red Kite Round Up*, guides take 10 children at a time on a digitally simulated outdoor adventure where they can chase butterflies, hike trails, star gaze, and more. *Red Kite Round Up* is one component of CCT's ongoing Red Kite Project for children with autism spectrum disorder, and is the third theatrical installation of its kind. Producing Artistic Director Jacqueline Russell is the driving force behind The Red Kite Project. As an artist in residence at Agassiz Elementary School, she has had the opportunity to teach drama to students with autism since 1997 and has witnessed firsthand the benefits for this unique audience.

Capacity for *Red Kite Round Up* is extremely limited and advanced reservations are required. For more information or to reserve tickets for *Red Kite Round Up*, please contact Julia Beck at **773.227.0180 ext. 15** or jbeck@chicagochildrenstheatre.org. For more information about The Red Kite Project visit theredkiteproject.org.

Student Matinee Scholarship Program

Through a generous grant from the Target Corporation, CCT will be implementing a new field trip program during specific performances per production that will include not only complimentary admission and study materials but also transportation. This program will accommodate approximately 6,000 students.

CCT will continue to offer its deeply discounted student rate of \$10 per person to its additional student matinee performances. Study materials geared towards each production will also be provided for download on CCT's website.

About Chicago Children's Theatre

Chicago Children's Theatre aspires to enrich our community through diverse and significant theatrical and educational programming that engages and inspires the child in all of us. Chicago Children's Theatre focuses on the production of first-rate children's theater in Chicago, with top writing, performing and directorial talent and high-quality design and production expertise.

Led by Artistic Director Jacqueline Russell, Board Chair Todd Leland, and Board President Tom Herman, the company is supported by a dynamic Board of Directors comprised of dedicated individuals from the fields of entertainment, philanthropy and business, and a committed Artistic Council of Chicago-based actors, directors, musicians and designers.

Founded in 2005, Chicago Children's Theatre strives to provide affordable and accessible theater for families and area school children. To enhance the impact of any given production's themes, Chicago Children's Theatre offers educational materials and programs for families and educators.

For more information about Chicago Children's Theatre visit chicagochildrenstheatre.org or call **773.227.0180**.

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