



Indy's **alternative** voice

Butler Theatre's 'The Two Maples'

by Hope Baugh – April 11, 2014



April 12-13, 17-19, 2014 at Lilly Hall Studio Theatre 168; part of Butler ArtsFest



Photos provided by Butler Theatre.

Butler Theatre's hour-long *The Two Maples*, presented during Butler ArtsFest, is "for children." But I enjoyed it, too. It gave me a fresh take on some iconic characters from folklore. The hero of the story is Vasilisa the Hard Worker. This sweet, sword-carrying mother (played by Amanda Reid) is looking for her two eldest sons, who went missing three years ago. When she learns that the forest witch, Baba Yaga, snatched them, Vasilisa vows to get them back, no matter what impossible tasks Baba Yaga sets for her. Along the way, Vasilisa's kindness earns her the help of several animals.

In director Elaina Artemiev's adaptation, Baba Yaga (played by Allyson Womack) is more selfish than scary. I know I am supposed to cheer for Vasilisa, and she is likable enough, but Baba Yaga is the one who breaks the rules, lives independently and wears gorgeous clothes that are easy to swoop around in. She forces people out of their comfort zones and in the process, they more fully realize their own strengths. Too bad she's so mean.



Another thing I appreciated about this show was that while it includes dances, poems, talking animals and more, it also has a calm respect for its audience that is often missing from theatre for children, at least what I've experienced. The professional design elements (set by Rob Koharchik, lighting by David Lapham, costumes by Angela Malone, choreography by Sergey Sergiev) enhance the feeling of being connected in pure, simple ways to the story.

Butler University students make up the cast. In addition to the two leads, several other students give strong performances. Nicole Bailey, for example, is adorable as "Mishka," the tap-dancing, narcoleptic Bear. Taylor Galloway is endearing as "Ivan the Giant" (officially Ivanushka, the youngest son). Abraham Scheckels is a hoot as The Chicken Legs House. There are others.