



Seattle Musical Theatre presents
Honk!
November 13-29, 2009



Pre-performance questions

The production calls itself "A soap opera on a pond". What is a soap opera? Think about any stories by Hans Christian Andersen that you might know. Do they seem like material for a soap opera to you? Why or why not?

Think about how you would perform a musical or play with animal characters. How much would you want them to act like animals? How much would you want them to act like humans?

The ugly duckling has to grow up and transform on stage. Think about how you would stage that kind of transformation. How can you make a character turn from a child to an adult in front of an audience?

Have you ever heard a person called an "ugly duckling"? What does that mean when it refers to a person?

Post-performance questions

Pick a song from the production that you enjoyed and watch how another production staged that number at www.stilesandrew.co.uk/honk/sights_and_sounds.html. How were the two different? Did you like the video version as much?

How closely did the performances match what you expected? Did you expect the characters to be more like animals or more human? Why do you think the director and actors chose this way?

One of the characters asks of Ugly, "He's not exactly your classic Beatrix Potter, is he?" Who was Beatrix Potter? What does this mean?

What is the moral of this story? Does it make sense to you? Why or why not?

What is a "fable"? In most fables, the main character undergoes some kind of test in the course of the story. Does Ugly undergo a test? What is it? Do you think this story is a fable?

Activities

Design a costume for a swan character and a duck character as played by humans. You might want to look at some photos of swans and ducks to help you. Does your costume look more like an animal or more human?

One of the inspirations for this production is the world of Beatrix Potter. Read some of Potter's stories and look at the pictures. Now think again about how you would design characters for this production. Does looking at the Potter books change your opinion any?

Read the source story for this musical, *The Ugly Duckling* by Hans Christian Andersen. What is the moral of this story? After seeing the musical, think about how the story and musical are different. Why do you think the musical's author made those changes?

Create a soundtrack for the story *The Ugly Duckling*. What kinds of songs would you play for the different parts of the story? After seeing the show, think about the music that you heard: was it similar to the music you chose? Different? Did you like it better or worse?

Find a friend and rehearse this scene from the musical. First, act it out as if you are both animals. Then, act it out as if you are both humans just pretending to be animals. Finally, try to do both at once: be mostly humans, but add some elements of being animals. Which version did you like best? Which version would you like to see on stage?

Look up the word "fable", then write your own fable. What kind of story did you come up with? Was it very different from *Honk!*?

CAT: Hello, Ducky!

UGLY: Who are you?

CAT: I'm your friend.

UGLY: I haven't got any friends. Everyone hates me because I'm ugly.

CAT: Oh they are too, too, too-too cruel. I think you look delicious.

UGLY: What did you say?

CAT: I said poultry can be so malicious. Look at them guzzling all that bread.

UGLY: It's supposed to be really nice; it's French.

CAT: Mmm. A l'orange. Do you mean to say that they didn't let you have any?

UGLY: Not a crumb.

CAT: Well that settles it then. Lunch is in...on me.

UGLY: Do you mean it? You really are a friend.

CAT: Of course I am. Now just follow me.

UGLY: I'd better tell my mother.

CAT: Oh no, you mustn't. Look, she is talking to Her Grace. Don't you know a duckling should never interrupt anyone who is talking to Her Grace?

UGLY: I really think I should....

CAT: Listen. We won't be gone for long. What harm can it do? And you're hungry, aren't you?

Did you know?

Honk! beat out *The Lion King* and *Mamma Mia* for the 2000 Olivier Award for Best New Musical.

The show's author originally intended to write musical versions of two other Hans Christian Andersen stories, *Thumbelina* and *The Red Shoes*. After reading Andersen's stories, he decided *The Ugly Duckling* would be a good source for a show.

The first version of this musical was titled *The Ugly Duckling, or, the Aesthetically Challenged Farmyard Fowl*. The original title of Hans Christian Andersen's story was going to be *The Young Swans*, but he changed it so readers wouldn't guess the ending.

150 years after Andersen published *The Ugly Duckling*, Jon Scieszka published a story titled *The Really Ugly Duckling*. In it, the ugly duckling grows up to be...an ugly duck.

For students

Seattle Musical Theatre offers free classes for middle and high school students, including free tickets to see our productions. Come join us for *Honk!*, Saturday, November 21, from 10-4. More information is available at (206) 363-2809 or jeremy@seattlemusicaltheatre.org.

Resources

More information about the musical, including a synopsis and links to music and videos, is available at <http://www.stilesanddrewe.co.uk/honk/>.

A more detailed synopsis and other links are available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honk!>.

Images from many productions are available by doing a Google Image search for "Honk!"

For help applying Washington state EALRs to the activities in this guide, please contact SMT's Director of Education at jeremy@seattlemusicaltheatre.org.

For teachers

Seattle Musical Theatre offers free tickets for teachers. Just call the box office and mention this offer to get two free tickets to see *Honk!*