

A Fine Reminder of Freedom

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“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” These famous words, written by poet Emma Lazarus, adorn the base of the Statue of Liberty. The inspiration for this poem, the struggle to raise funds for the statue’s base, and the journey of Lady Liberty from France to the New York Harbor, are beautifully portrayed in “Lady of Copper”, a musical for children produced by Theater Garden.

This enchanting 45-minute show is a poignant reminder of everything for which we should be thankful. The sophisticated themes of immigration, struggle, slavery, freedom, and teamwork are boiled down to their essence and depicted in an accessible form. The actors are engaging in their portrayals of immigrants; a former slave; the statue’s French sculptor, Frederic Bartholdi; poet Emma Lazarus; the newspaper publisher, Joseph Pulitzer; President Grover Cleveland; and of course, the statue. A guitar player perfectly complements the actors’ beautiful voices. The props, costumes, and simple sets all convincingly evoke the 1880s.

The songs meld seamlessly into the dialogue and help tell the story from multiple perspectives. “If you look back far enough, there’s an immigrant in every family,” sings Emma Lazarus, as she explains how she became inspired to write “The New Colossus”. And the statue sings: “I’ll be a symbol for this land but all I’ll need is a place to stand. Now, how will I do that?”

A song about slavery is very moving, albeit a bit graphic in its depiction of the sorrow. One of the most rousing songs was about Harriet Tubman’s Underground Railroad, in which the cast sang “no coal, no caboose.” The connection to slavery becomes clear as the statue later stands on the former slave’s broken shackles. I had tears in my eyes during the finale, when the statue raises her lamp and the ensemble sings: “I lift my lamp beside the golden door,” the last line of Lazarus’ poem. Especially since the September 11 disaster, this reminder of freedom appeals to the sense of patriotism in all of us.



Theater Garden produces educational theater aimed to “bring history to life for students of all ages.” The show, written by brother and sister team Dana Leslie and Jonathan Goldstein, is particularly tailored for students in grades 3-6, and complements many school curriculums. However, students in grades K-8 should enjoy the show, believes executive director Susan Michelin.

My children, ages 2 1/2 and almost 6, were transfixed. Theater Garden has created an outstanding study guide, which includes historical information, the symbolism of the statue, activities, and additional resources for students and adults. If you visit their website, you can download the study guide, see photos, and hear the finale song. My children and I have been humming this tune for weeks, and I can almost guarantee that if you hear it, you will want to see the show.

Lady of Copper has been featured at school assemblies for several years, and recently opened this run for general audiences. After September 11, the company repainted the final backdrop of the current New York skyline to make it more stylized because it had contained images of the Twin Towers. In fact, since September 11, many schools have been reluctant to visit the Statue of Liberty, so they have been booking the show in

their schools instead.

Avram Ludwig, a member of Theater Garden’s board of directors, is producing a film version of the show that is currently in pre-production.

“Lady of Copper” has been showing at The Culture Project on Bleecker Street, but may be moving this month. For further information about dates, times, and the show’s Manhattan location (including possible school shows), or for reservations, call (212) 501-6920 or visit www.theatergarden.org. Admission is \$15 adults, \$7 for children under 12.

*-Melissa B. Stoller
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