

SBU Theater's A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD Offers a 'Ribbit-ing' Good Time

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With classic red draperies framing the stage and and silhouettes of the orchestra tuning against a blue scrim, SBU Theater presented their nostalgic adaptation of Robert and Willie Reale's musical A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD last weekend in the Regina A. Quick Center for the Arts.

The musical, based on the books by Arnold Lobel, presents the adventures of best friends and neighbors Frog (senior philosophy major Brett Keegan) and Toad (senior modern languages major Ian Rogers) over the course of the year. The seasons change, cookies bake and clocks break as Frog and Toad learn what it is to be a friend.

Rogers and Keegan displayed strong vocal talent and comedic skills, singing Reale's catchy, cheery melodies with a perfect balance of diction and heart. Rogers' animated facial expressions inspired laughter among the audience, especially during "Seeds," when Toad resorts to interpretive dance to inspire his garden to grow faster.

The birds, portrayed by Molly Schaefer, a junior sociology major, Christina Stankewicz, a junior history major and Lea Battaglia, a sophomore English major, offered a perfectly harmonized musical flashback to the days of The Andrews Sisters. The three ladies carried the show through the seasons, and displayed unique personalities among their tightly knit flock.

Snail, portrayed by sophomore journalism and mass communication and theater major Tori Lanzillo, easily became an audience favorite as she slowly and carefully took the year (and most of the show) to deliver a letter from Frog to Toad, declaring she was the snail with the mail who delivers without fail. Lanzillo shined in her coming-of-age tune "I'm Coming Out of My Shell," celebrating her triumph in delivering the letter and impressing the audience by belting a part written for a tenor.

Puppet designer Alexandra Herryman's, '04, Large and Terrible Frog also made its debut in "Shivers," instigating a warm mixture of laughs and gasps from the audience as Frog told a story from his youth about a scary encounter in the forest. The song featured an adorable and endearing solo from junior theater major Brooke Perkins as Young Frog, and showcased Stankewicz's unmatched soprano skills as Mother Frog.

"Cookies" also stood out as a memorable song in the show. The hilarious Act I closer, sung by everyone in the cast, featured everyone's obsession with Toad's delicious, freshly baked cookies. They even resorted to flinging them all over the stage with excitement.

The ultimate scene stealer of the production was, in fact, the scenery itself. Designed by Rebecca Misenheimer, associate professor of theater, the vaudeville-inspired set featured illustrative creations from painted-on furniture and cardboard waves for Frog and Toad to swim in to paper leaves and snowflakes for their respective seasons. It provided the perfect setting to tie the show together, and the set changes and transitions flowed so seamlessly it seemed as if the play was one continuous narrative as opposed to

a series of vignettes. The overall look of the show remained nostalgic and gave an essence of the beloved vaudeville shows of yesteryear.

Earth tones inspired the costumes, designed by senior theater and journalism and mass communication major Emily West. With a color palette reminiscent of the original books, West smartly utilized blazers, sweaters and even football shoulder pads to provide the visual identity of each of the animals. Keegan and Rogers concluded the show in tuxedos, adding that special "finale touch" to the reprise of the show's opening (and title) musical number.

The overall enthusiasm and talent of the cast surrounded by an orchestra, conducted by senior music major Ryan Thompson, and some of the most intelligent design choices SBU Theater has made produced an absolutely adorable show, adored by audience members of all ages. While the unseasonably cold wind engulfed the campus, A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD brought springtime and happy thoughts to everyone who showed up for the adventure in friendship.