

## **REVIEW: The New York Times review of a recent children's show...**

### **'Aesop's Fables'**

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*"What goes around comes around," the triumphant Wolf says sneeringly to the Fox. This may not be Aesop's wording, but it succinctly captures his message. It also neatly describes the action at the Circle in the Square Theater, where that ancient Greek's sly and savvy animals are running through the aisles, up and down the stairs and onto the stage in "Aesop's Fables," a new children's musical directed by Theodore Mann and presented by the theater school's Alumni Ensemble.*

*The space's configuration — the audience is seated in the round — offers viewers circuslike thrills as the stories' beasts enter and exit in their midst. The adult actors, wearing ingenious masks (some revamped from other shows, some created by Sophia Duran and Hannah Scott) morph so effectively into forest creatures that it hardly matters that "Aesop's Fables" has no scenery. (The empty stage is later filled with the set for "The Miracle Worker.")*

*Aesop (Justin D. Quackenbush) functions as a genial M.C. for the show, which deftly weaves "The Tortoise and the Hare," "The Boy Who Cried Wolf," "The Fox and the Crow" and "The Lion and the Mouse" into a single narrative. Michael Milligan, who wrote the book, opens the action with a race, where the only runner brave enough to challenge Roddy the Rabbit (Kane Prestenback) is Travis the Tortoise (Marissa Parness).*

*The other tales unfold against the backdrop of that competition, with the wily Wolf (Clark Thomas Feeney) popping up frequently as an all-purpose bad guy. He steals from the Fox (Courtney Shaw) and casts the net that traps the Lion (Rendell Anthony DeBose).*

*This adaptation avoids Aesop's preachiness with the help of humor, Joziah Longo's score and lots of audience involvement. Mr. Longo, also the lyricist, has Travis droning a comically slow tune while Roddy rocks out. The two Sheep sing a funny baa-ing and lah-ing counterpoint to the Shepherd Boy's ballad of boredom. And if your children have never cried wolf, they will certainly do so here.*

*One caveat: theatergoers under 5 may find the Wolf's menacing scary. They should be reassured that this Wolf doesn't get to steal any children, but he comes close to stealing the show.*