

Kaleidoscope

Images in Motion



Photo: Liz Gorrie

Red from
Kaleidophonics —
Kaleidoscope's
symphony show.

A kaleidoscope presents reflected images in motion, ever-changing perspectives of brilliant colour and shape. So too does Kaleidoscope Theatre, an innovative west-coast theatre company that combines mime, improvisation, music, song, movement, dance and mask in its vibrant productions.

Founded 14 years ago in the Vancouver Island city of Victoria, Kaleidoscope has been dubbed the "theatre of imagery." Its presentations, staged with the barest essentials in set pieces, costuming and props, are impressionistic rather than realistic, leaving much of the interpretation up to the audience's own perceptions and imaginations.

Those unfamiliar with Kaleidoscope are often startled to learn that such an experimental theatre is one devoted to producing drama for children and youth. But Kaleidoscope's

Creative Director, Elizabeth Gorrie, thinks the imagistic style and children are well suited. "We often underestimate the fresh keenness of children's minds — their imagination, curiosity and creativity. If a drama can satisfy a child's untempered creative sense, it can certainly satisfy that of adults."

Over the years, Kaleidoscope's more than 60 original productions have charmed both the young and the young at heart across Canada, the United States, Japan and Israel.

Two performing companies bring Kaleidoscope to life. The first, Story Theatre Company, is acclaimed for its contemporary adaptations of classic fables and folktales. Featuring original song and music, the adaptations spotlight the performers' talent for on-the-spot improvisation in response to audience suggestions. The results are often hilarious. Aesop's fables have been peopled by Santa Claus, brain surgeons and leading political figures.

"Cartoon super heroes are particularly popular with young audiences," notes Director Jim Leard, "which means the actors must watch a lot of Saturday morning cartoons to familiarize themselves with all the characters. But whatever the suggested setting or characters, the actors always manage to convey the fable's original moral lesson."

Beneath the fun there is a deep commitment to education. Playing in hundreds of schools each year, Story Theatre designs much of its repertoire to convey appropriate educational lessons in science, history and literature. And while on tour, the company also offers theatre workshops for teachers and students.

Currently, the company is busy preparing its newest production, *Dreams and Drag-ins*. Loosely based on local secondary students' essays, stories and poetry about their dreams and what stands in their way, the play

promises to be both thought-provoking and entertaining. Given Story Theatre's knack for surprising its audiences, a "guest appearance" by a dragon might be expected — but the company is giving away no hints yet.

Kaleidoscope's other performing group, the Resident Company, mounts a panoply of plays ranging from adapted Shakespearean classics to satirical spoofs of television comedy shows. Impossible to categorize or predict, the company is perhaps consistently characterized only by the sense of vitality and versatility that animates its experimental productions.

Together the two companies have brought Kaleidoscope's original style to the world stage. They have appeared at the International Theatre Festival in Wales and the American Showcase of Performing Arts for Young People in Birmingham, Alabama, in the United States. Story Theatre tours extensively across Canada and the United