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# Otterbein's 'Emperor' succeeds with slapstick, sophisticated set

By Nancy Gilson  
Dispatch Arts Reporter

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Otterbein College Theatre has fashioned a Chinese *Emperor's New Clothes* with liberal parts slapstick and irreverence — and no preoccupation with political correctness. And that's good.

The annual children's show is a lively and confident transfer of the fairy tale to the Orient, involving a foppish emperor, rogue weavers, discreet Eastern music, intriguing sets of bamboo and tapestry and, ironically, lavish costumes. Christine Kirk directs the show with a pervading sense of fun, making it a treat for even the youngest viewers.

The Charlotte Chorpenning script focuses on weavers — the emperor's own beleaguered lot persecuted by the prime minister — and a pair of charlatans who stumble into the village looking for adventure.

Driven by an Eastern sensibility that makes them believe that a plan will unfold itself, Zar (Amy McAlexander) and Zan (Lindsay Metcalfe) conjure up a scheme to help the abused weavers and stir up an adventure for themselves.

Their shenanigans are set against Madeleine Sobota's sophisti-

## THEATER REVIEW

*The Emperor's New Clothes.* Otterbein College Theatre's production directed by Christine Kirk with musical direction by Jennifer Bell.

Emperor..... Christopher Dean  
Empress ..... Amber Mellott  
Han ..... Nikki Hersch  
Zar ..... Amy McAlexander  
Zan ..... Lindsay Metcalfe  
Child..... Zach Monroe  
The General..... Theodore Sima

**A tale of two tailors.**

**Being performed** at 7:30 tonight, 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Saturday and 1:30 p.m. Sunday in Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St., Westerville.

**Tickets cost** \$5 general, \$5.50 reserved. (823-1109)

cated set, with its watercolor landscapes of trees and mountains behind a street of pagodalike shops. When the scene changes to the emperor's palace, cast and crew remove the slanted roofs, drop ornamental blinds over the windows and attach glowing lanterns to what used to be shops, an impressive transformation that occurs before the audience.

Amy Kaufman, a senior at Ot-

terbein, has created vivid costumes of red and black for the evil minister's lackeys, tatters for the town weavers, regal gowns for the court and a jolly set of emperor underwear that could have come from a hospital laundry room.

The visual goodies don't stand in the way of lively performances. As the emperor, Christopher Dean sports a big belly that matches his big foolishness. He swaggers with a comic blend of self-importance and insecurity; his knobby-kneed strut in the hospital gown makes kids in the audience howl. The Empress (Amber Mellott) is a bundle of tears and self-doubt. Nikki Hersch, while she often drags her lines and slows down the action, provides a commanding presence as the evil minister Han. Her snooty walk onstage announces that she's a bully.

McAlexander and Metcalfe have the best time, however, as the Abbott and Costello of this Hans Christian Andersen fable. Their spur-of-the-moment scheming is combined with screams of panic (or delight) and physical humor that keeps the tale percolating. One of their best bits is their fight with a palace closet door that won't stay shut. This sort of shtick permeates and, indeed, seems tailor-made for this irreverent tale.



## Arts

## Andersen's 'Emperor' takes theater spotlight

by Carrie Troup

ARTS EDITOR

Fairy tales will come to life as the theater department presents this year's children's play, "The Emperor New Clothes."

The fable, based on Hans Christen Andersen's tale, tells of a greedy emperor who has a passion for clothes. The emperor is eventually fooled by two travelers who claim to make clothes that are invisible to anyone stupid. Out of fear of being ridiculed, no one is willing to admit the emperor is wearing no clothing. Finally, a child reveals the emperor is without clothes.

Director Chris Kirk said presenting the "classic fairy tale" is a way of serving the community. "The Emperor's New Clothes" appeals to all ages, and theater students benefit from performing for the school-age audience, she said.

"This is a story about life," Kirk said. "Do you speak or

operate out of fear? The themes of this play are ageless."

The theater department is putting its own spin on Andersen's tale, Kirk said.

"Usually the thieves are evil and just out for a buck, but these are good ones making it an interesting twist," Kirk said. "Also, we work with women playing traditionally male roles."

Sophomore Amy McAlexander's role, Zar, one of the two travelers, was meant to be a male role.

"Zar is mystical, intuitive and likes to plan ahead," McAlexander, a musical theater major, said. "Zan, the other adventurer, just goes for it."

Although children may not be able to understand the "deeper" meaning of the play, McAlexander said, they would get the basic message of not to be afraid of living life.

Theatrical experiences with children's plays is what influenced senior Christopher Dean,

who is cast as emperor, to make children's theater his concentration.

"I like the broadness of children's theater. I went from playing Mr. Mole last year to a Chinese emperor," Dean said. "The physical characteristics of the roles offer variety from the way he walks to the way the Emperor wears his clothes—it allows for a lot of imagination."

As Emperor, Dean was fitted with a special suit to make him appear overweight. Dean appears in a T-shirt and boxers when the character wears his "invisible" clothes. To keep his boxers up, Dean had to wear suspenders under his shirt.

"'Larger than life' would be the best way to describe the Emperor," Dean said. "He is overweight, has lots of hair on his face and his clothes are his security."

Children should be able to relate and follow the action of the play, Dean said.



photo by Lora Winship

**Down and depressed.** The Royal Weavers, played by Katie Pees, Meg Morman, Jessica Luniewsky and Olivia Goldsberry beg for the opportunity to show their work to the Emperor.

"Children are the most honest audience anyone could ever have because you have to keep them entertained," Dean said. "Adults will just automatically clap at the end."

"The Emperor's New Clothes" features original music by Westerville resident Jennifer

Bell and costumes designed by senior Amy Kaufman.

Performances of "The Emperor's New Clothes" are Friday at 7:30 p.m., Saturday at 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. and Sunday at 1:30 p.m. Tickets are free to students with an Otterbein I.D. Call Ext. 1109 for ticket information.



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# Otterbein swaths 'Emperor' in magic as '97 kids show

By JULIANNE HOHBACH

Suburban News Reporter

The Otterbein College production of *The Emperor's New Clothes* Nov. 21-23 will carry some lessons in being truthful and self-reliant from which both children and adults can learn.

*The Emperor's New Clothes* is this year's children's show, but both children and their parents will benefit from its moral, said Director Christina Kirk. Otterbein takes a classic children's tale to the stage every year.

This version of the fairy tale, set in Asia, is written by Charlotte Chorpenning. The script describes the tale's setting as "a land like China."

"The settings are very Chinese, the costumes are Chinese. The whole produc-

tion has a Chinese aura to it," Kirk said.

"We're trying to create some magic."

The tale centers on an emperor with a passion for extravagant clothes. His passion leads him to be tricked by two thieves, who claim they can make clothes which are invisible to anyone who is stupid or not worthy of their work.

*"We're having a lot of fun with the undergarments and things like that."*

—Christina Kirk  
director

As the weavers work at empty looms, no one in the kingdom will admit they see no clothes out of fear of being perceived as foolish. Finally, the emperor learns the truth through the honesty of a child.

■ Otterbein will present *The Emperor's New Clothes* at 7:30 p.m. Friday, 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Saturday and 1:30 p.m. Sunday at Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St.

The 18-member cast began rehearsals in mid-October, Kirk said. The show has original music, composed and performed by musical director Jennifer Bell.

Costumes for the show are designed by Otterbein senior Amy Kaufman. Kaufman won the

Design Project 1997 competition at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for her work in scenic design.

"I'm thrilled with the costumes. They're going to be really delightful for the

kids," Kirk said.

"We're having a lot of fun with the undergarments and things like that. The show is a feast for the eyes."

Kirk said Chorpenning's version of the classic tale has a few differences. The weavers, for example, are not thieves as in the original story, but nice people.

The theme of not being afraid to speak one's mind remains intact.

"Another part of it is how you're going to get through

the day when you don't know where you're going (and) how you're going to handle a crisis when it comes up," Kirk said.

"What we find is, it's OK to not know where you're going."

Kirk said a lot of Eastern Tao philosophy is represented through such themes in the play — themes to which children and adults both can make connections.

"I think grownups are going to be affected by this play. I have been. (It teaches you) about not being afraid and facing things head on, to when you think something is foolish or stupid, say it's foolish or stupid," she explained.

Kirk said the most chal-

lenging part of the production has been remaining true to that spirit of not knowing what lies ahead with actors who obviously know the end.

But despite the serious lessons, Kirk said the show is an "incredibly comic, high farce production with lots of comedy."

*The Emperor's New Clothes* will be presented at 7:30 p.m. Friday, 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Saturday and 1:30 p.m. Sunday. All performances will be held in Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St.

Tickets are \$5 for general admission and \$5.50 for reserved seating. To reserve tickets call the Otterbein box office at 823-1109. The office is open 1-4:30 p.m.