

Halifax, NS | Thu, November 29th, 2007

Version For Persons With Vision Loss

Light rain	
The Weather Network	7° Celsius

# The ChronicleHerald ENTERTAINMENT

[Obituaries](#) | [Columnists](#) | [Blogs](#) | [Lotteries](#) | [Horoscope](#) | [Sudoku](#) | [Crossword](#) | [Contests](#) | [Contact](#)
[NEWS](#) > [OPINIONS](#) > [BUSINESS](#) > [SPORTS](#) > [ENTERTAINMENT](#) > [LIVING](#) > [CLASSIFIEDS](#) > [ARCHIVE](#) **SPEEDREAD**

Sports News | Sports Columns

[Print](#) [E-Mail](#) Text Size [S](#) [M](#) [L](#) [Digg This!](#) [Newswire](#) [Share on Facebook](#)
Search:  Today  7 Days  Web [▶](#)

## Spinning a web of creativity

Few kids are likely to forget A Spider's Tale

By STEPHEN PEDERSEN Arts Reporter

Thu. Nov 29 - 6:38 AM



Sarah Levey, left, Benedict Dingle and Margaret Legere rehearse a scene from DalTheatre's and Symphony Nova Scotia's production of A Spider's Tale, running to Saturday at the Sir James Dunn Theatre, Dalhousie Arts Centre, Halifax. (Peter Parsons / Staff)

While not flawless in execution, the DalTheatre/Symphony Nova Scotia production of violist Binnie Brennan's A Spider's Tale is strikingly original and successful in integrating the orchestra into an engagingly dramatic piece of musical theatre.

Like no other family show I know which uses the symphony to attract young listeners, not even the laudable productions such as Beethoven Lives Upstairs and Mr. Bach Comes to Call, the symphony in A Spider's Tale is not mere background music but plays a major role in the story.

The orchestra is wittily involved right from the beginning when the stage manager, Ralph (Aaron Walker), sweeps and tidies the orchestra set-up, replacing a missing music stand and chasing Maestro Mouse off the stage.

The story is all about Trixie Spider's triumph — with a little help from her friends — over the vertigo which prevents her from getting close to the source of the music that makes her breathless with joy.

She has been traumatized by the experience of her itty-bitsy uncle in climbing the legendary water-spout and being repeatedly washed down by the rain. SNS second bassoonist Chris Palmer has orchestrated a delightfully whimsical version of this classic children's song which the orchestra plays during the show.

Maestro Mouse, who sees himself conducting the orchestra, returns, steals the baton from the Human Maestro (SNS conductor-in-residence Dinuk Wijeratne), and conducts the orchestra while Wijeratne is still preparing to go on stage. M. Mouse beat-syncs while Wijeratne conducts just barely out of sight in the threshold of a cunningly built Vom (an entrance from the stage coming from under the audience.)

The device keeps the orchestra in the story. They react to Maestro Mouse's gestures so convincingly he really thinks the "magic" baton is doing it all. At the same time he engages with the dramatic story taking place mostly on the top of the Vom itself between Trixie and her other friends, Morrisey Moth and Brianna Bee.

Thirteen actors, clad head to toe in white, are Spirits of the Theatre, and function like a mute Greek Chorus in creating closets and washrooms, and circulating through the orchestra. They only speak in a witty sequence in which individual Spirits stand behind musicians and tell us what musicians are thinking about when they play. You might be shocked.

It's not true, of course. The musicians of Symphony Nova Scotia could not play as luminously as they do in this show if anything but the music were the object of their thoughts. It is a different matter when they are counting rests or sitting a tacit movement out.

The production is enormously complex, and that is both a virtue and a fault. It resonates in the memory long after the lights come up at the end of the show.

The musical examples are radiant, excerpts among others from Beethoven's Sixth, Mozart's Eine Kleine Nacht Musik, Rimsky-Korsakov's Flight of the Bumblebee, the Habanera from Carmen, and some lovely music by Chris Palmer. The highlight, in my book, was an ecstatic performance of an excerpt from Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet during which the Spirits are inspired to dance.

Some of the original music, particularly the three songs written by student Zach Florence, is a little too original. While they are extremely skilful and mature songs, they are stylistically so modern in texture they are at odds with the simplicity of children's songs, such as, for example, The Itsy Bitsy Spider.

They are also extremely difficult to sing, particularly with the light, music-theatre voices of the cast. Much of this burden is shouldered by Margaret Legere as Trixie. Her songs, admirably articulated, lie awkwardly for her range — very powerful in the belt register, extremely thin in head voice. Somehow, she brings them off, and as an actress she puts in a convincing,

### MULTIMEDIA CENTRE

TOP VIDEO



Ont. kids pay tribute to AIDS victims

TOP VIDEO



Schreiber testifies before Commons committee

TOP SLIDESHOW



Pictures of the Week Nov. 17-23

ANNOUNCEMENTS: [Obits](#) | [Births](#) | [Cards](#) | [InMemoriams](#) | [Milestones](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

### TODAY'S ENTERTAINMENT STORIES

#### WHAT'S HAPPENING?

May your days be merry & bright  
Winehouse cancels concerts  
Taylor, King to reunite  
Driver of de Broin's artwork arrested  
Page best new actor at indie film awards  
DaPoPo updates Mystery-Bouffe  
Folds of Policy brings the 'City' to the Seahorse  
Usher's a dad  
Lessing's Nobel trip nixed  
Hear the inside story  
Harlem Gospel Choir to perform in Halifax  
Rusty, Jerome looking for new digs after lewd comedy sketch  
Castroneves quicksteps way to victory  
ER's Visnjic agrees to pay child support  
ASTROLOGICAL FORECAST  
TATTLER  
Belles of Christmas

[Back to Entertainment Section](#)

inviting performance which is first-class all the way.

Benedict Dingle as Morrisey Moth and Sarah Levy as Brianna Levy are also superbly centered in their characters, contributing like McLeod and Walker to a vividly believable milieu within the walls where these creatures live out their days.

McLeod's Maestro Mouse is a major character, a kind of major-domo who keeps the show moving with his enthusiasm for seeing himself as a conductor (though he credits the magic baton for his success).

The orchestra is a constant, living presence in this show. Wijeratne, apart from his brilliance as a conductor, is also a very good actor. He hasn't any lines, but his pantomime is both witty and persuasive.

A Spider's Tale is an ambitious, complex, highly original production in which the creativity of the DalTheatre students in playwriting, assisting in Peter Perina's extraordinary scenography, in singing and acting all come together for an hour and 10 minutes of engaging theatrical fantasy.

The storyline is so strong, it cuts through all the complexities in the telling of it. Few kids are likely to forget it.

( [spedersen@herald.ca](mailto:spedersen@herald.ca) )

[ABOUT US](#) | [CONTACT US](#) | [PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [CHARITIES](#) | [ADVERTISING](#) | [SUBSCRIBE](#) | [FAQ](#) | [COMICS](#) | [HIGHWAY CAMS](#)  
[WORK @ THE CHRONICLE HERALD](#) | [WEATHER](#) | [TIDES](#) | [LOTTERIES](#) | [FEATURES](#) | [HOROSCOPE](#) | [CONTESTS](#)  
[ADVERTISING](#) | [WEB ADVERTISING](#) | [CLIENT UPLOAD](#) | [SPECIAL FEATURES](#) | [MEDIA KIT \(PDF\)](#) | [SUBSCRIPTIONS](#) | [LIBRARY SERVICES](#) | [NIE](#)

© 2007 The Halifax Herald Limited

[BACK TO TOP](#)