

Theatre Review: Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Princess and the Pea' Gets Modern Makeover at The Marriott

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CHICAGO – Merging old-fashioned chivalry with modern-day TV screens, **The Marriott Theatre for Young Audiences** is currently staging a smile-inducing, family friendly reimagining of **Hans Christian Andersen's** beloved fairy tale “**The Princess and the Pea**”.



Play Rating: **4.0/5.0**

An imaginative morality tale that celebrates true love and staying true to yourself, this one-hour show tailored to kids inspires audiences of all ages to ask one very important question: Is love forced or earned?



Alex Goodrich (left) Dara Cameron in “The Princess and the Pea” at The Marriott Theatre.

Photo credit: Mark Campbell Photography, The Marriott Theatre

Joined by musical director **Ryan T. Nelson**, **Scott Weinstein** makes his directorial debut at The Marriott Theatre with a version of “The Princess and the Pea” that is propelled by *The Princess Test*. Much like the grand ball thrown by the prince in Cinderella to find his wife based on love rather than royalty, here The Princess Test is designed by Prince Wellington's (Jeff Award winner **Alex Goodrich**) evil Queen Evermean (Jeff Award winner **Susan Moniz**) to find his perfect princess.

Problems ensue, though, when Queen Evermean unfairly picks the beautiful blonde airhead Buffy (**Samantha Pauly**) who the prince does not

vibe. Instead, our nerdy prince loves to write and longs for a woman more of his own literary ilk. Lusting for love rather than a royal fit, the prince bumps into a common girl named Ruth (Jeff Award nominee **Dara Cameron**) in the woods.

Ruth loves nothing more than reading her books and her Papa (**Don Forston**), but soon finds herself awkwardly falling for the prince. The prince asserts himself to his domineering queen to thrust Ruth into The Princess Test even though royal blood doesn't course through her veins. The short, three-question test combines intellect with beauty and grace to determine a glass-slipper fit for Prince Wellington.



Susan Moniz as Queen Evermean in "The Princess and the Pea" at The Marriott Theatre.

Photo credit: Mark Campbell Photography, The Marriott Theatre

While the test is simplified for kids and isn't a comprehensive determination of what it takes for two hearts to match, the bed portion of the play is unfortunately minimized by The Marriott's version of the story. Here it's used by the queen as the final straw to rule out Ruth. Along with her books and her dad, she also loves to sleep and claims she can anywhere.

As her final test, Queen Evermean forces Ruth to sleep on a bed piled high with lots of mattresses. Unknown to Ruth, hidden underneath is a single pea. If she endures a sleepless night on top of the lumpy pea, Ruth must be sensitive enough to be a real princess. The pea part of the show, which only comes in the final act, feels like an afterthought instead of a more central plot point.



Samantha Pauly (left) and Susan Moniz in "The Princess and the Pea" at The Marriott Theatre.

Photo credit: Mark Campbell Photography, The Marriott Theatre

Nevertheless, kids who see the story acted out for the first time or experience it after having read it will enjoy The Marriott's TV show creativity. Cleverly using TV screens to hold your attention through scene changes, the TV screens also give the typically non-techie story a modern game show-like feel. The play is entertainingly presented as a television show, and fortunately or unfortunately, the format is a language that modern-day kids speak.

The show runs like a well-oiled machine and is devoid of lighting, sound and acting snafus. Every seat in The Marriott's theatre-in-the-round house offers an easily visible location because the stage is in the center. Actors are chipper, high energy, overly expressive and campy just as they should be for this demographic, but the content caters specifically to kids. Usually a family-friendly show of this nature disguises some adult-themed humor that flies safely over the heads of kids, but children come first here.

"The Princess and the Pea" runs now through May 3, 2015 at The Marriott Theatre for Young Audiences most Tuesdays through Sundays at 10 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. Visit MarriottTheatre.com [16] or call 847-634-0200 as show times and dates vary. Single-ticket prices are \$17.23 per person (with fees and taxes). Groups of 20 or more receive a discount by calling 847-634-5909. Free parking is available at all shows. Directed by Scott Weinstein with musical director Ryan T. Nelson, "The Princess and the Pea" stars Alex Goodrich as Prince Wellington, Dara Cameron as Ruth, Susan Moniz as Queen Evermean, Don Forston as Papa and TV Reporter, Samantha Pauly as Buffy and Derrick Trumbly as Chester. A Q&A session is featured at the conclusion of the show.



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