

The Patriot Ledger

Former Broadway child actor now directing kids on Boston stage

Broadway veteran Danielle Ferland is directing “A Year in the Life of Frog and Toad.”

By Alexander Stevens
GateHouse News Service

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Danielle Ferland knows a thing or two about being a child actor. She made her Broadway debut at age 13 in Stephen Sondheim’s “Sunday in the Park with George,” and three years later, she was back on Broadway originating the role of Little Red Riding Hood in “Into the Woods.”

Now she’s imparting her wisdom to a new generation of young actors, as she directs the Boston Children’s Theatre production of “A Year in the Life of Frog and Toad,” a show she performed in – yes, on Broadway – as an adult. Another impressive Broadway credit: She played opposite Dianne Wiest, John Lithgow and Katie Holmes in the recent, high-profile production of “All My Sons.”

But right now her attention is on “Frog and Toad,” a musical she describes as “a timeless tale of loyalty and trust.”

Q: There’s nothing more impressive than watching a child actor who’s a natural. But there’s nothing worse than watching a child actor who thinks that acting means overacting. Can you cure them of that?

A: Oh, sure. You can cure overacting in anyone. It’s bad training that makes them overact. It’s actually harder to break bad habits in adults. Anything can happen if you work hard at it.

Q: So you worked with Stephen Sondheim when he was in the middle of his legendary, god-like status. What's it like working with god?

A: (Laughs) I have a different perspective now. Then, I was just a kid doing a show. But (Sondheim) is brilliant. There's nothing more to say. He's a soulful, soft-spoken gentleman. He's very humble; never a diva.

Q: Why do you have such affection for "Frog and Toad?"

A: I just love the whole story, how the author's daughter commissioned the musical as a celebration of her father's work. (Arnold Lobel wrote the "Frog and Toad" books.) It's a show for kids that adults can appreciate. Children's theater doesn't have to talk down to kids. It doesn't have to be hokey and kitschy.

Q: Do you have favorite moments in "Frog and Toad?"

A: My favorite moments are the simplest ones. But there are also some great songs. The audience loves "Cookies," because the kids (onstage) go kind of ballistic. But the songs "Alone" and "Seeds" both kinda make me cry.

Q: I'm sure you believe theater has value for kids, even if they never get one professional job. What do you think they get out of it?

A: So many things. A sense of self. Confidence. Self-esteem. They learn about group trust, and how to work well with others.

Q: So I have a crush on Katie Holmes. Since you worked with her on Broadway, can you tell me: Do you think I have a chance with her?

A: No, I don't think you have a chance. She was very professional and totally devoted to ("All My Sons"). The whole cast was great. John Lithgow and Dianne Wiest – it doesn't get any better than that.

Q: Did Mr. Katie Holmes hang around a lot?

A: Yes, he was around all the time. He was very supportive.

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