

# The New York Times

## Arts

### Children's Theatre Company

#### From Ridiculous Royals to Regal Women

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Family Fare

Those who rise to power often do so on the backs of others. This is literally true in the Dr. Seuss story "Yertle the Turtle," in which the title character makes himself the tallest throne from a stack of his subjects. The hero is the bottommost turtle, Mack, and by the end, well, how the mighty have fallen.



Photo by Bill Aristovoulos, courtesy of Children's Theatre Company

This tale, beloved by young readers, is now being performed by them in a triple bill of one-act

musicals by the Children's Theater Company. The showcase is divided according to the age of the actors, and "Yertle," adapted by Lory Lazarus, presents the talents of the tiniest. Training 4- to 7-year-olds is an art in itself, and what this production lacks in seamlessness it makes up for in charm.

"King Kunka Bunka and the Rotten Royal Rascals," by Mehr Mansuri (the troupe's founder and artistic director), Frank Sanchez and Nasan Fitzhenley, features 11- to 14-year-olds. Written in Seuss-style rhyme, the show centers on a widowed monarch's search for an heir. Her children, hopelessly unqualified, represent vices indicated by their nicknames: Proudeska, Chatterina, Rudekof, etc. Their deficiencies exposed, the royal offspring are sent off to spend a year at tasks intended to reform them. (Chatterina, for instance, has to work in a library.) Acted with great brio, this tuneful fairy tale emphasizes the value of service without being preachy.

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The final one-act, "Respect: A Musical History of Women," based on a book by Dorothy Marcic, uses popular song to chronicle

American women's struggle for rights and self-awareness. Enthusiastically performed by actors ages 7 to 11, it travels a musical route from "Bill Bailey" (1902) to "I Will Survive" (1978) and beyond.

It's all great fun, with one caveat: The program runs slightly over two hours. Like children at the table, those at the theater often do better with a delicious snack — say, one or two of these shows — than with a three-course banquet.

Children's Theater Company, through July 30 at the Baha'i Unity Center, 53 East 11th Street, East Village, (212) 633-6629. Saturdays and Sundays at 4:30 p.m., except July 30, at 6:30 p.m. Additional show next Friday at noon. Tickets: \$12.

