

★ ★ Capsule Reviews ★ ★

CHILDREN'S THEATRE

EMIL AND THE DETECTIVES. Adapted by Cyrus Brook. Gramercy Arts Theatre, 138 East 27th Street.

The Pocket Players' presentation of *Emil and the Detectives*, recently arrived at the Gramercy Arts Theatre, 138 East 27th Street, is a welcome addition to the world of children's theatre. Erich Kaestner's story, long a favorite in book and play form of children here and abroad, in this current production has been given a quick pace and clever staging which results in a performance that is both exciting and amusing.

Futhermore, Muriel Sharon and Richard Edelman, co-directors of the play, have not only endowed their production with vitality and suspense but have given it a professional polish. Despite its two hour length, *Emil* keeps the audience rapt and attentive.

Basically a tale of "cops and robbers" with a chase, the appeal of this play to children is understandable. It is the story of Emil, a young boy sent by his widowed mother to visit his grandmother in Berlin, bearing a large gift of money for her. En route, Emil's money is stolen by a moustached stranger in a bowler hat. How Emil, joined by an eager group of young volunteer "detectives", tracks down the culprit and recoups his loss is the main concern of the play. All the surefire ingredients for action and suspense are present in Cyrus Brook's adaption of the original story.

The play employs a large cast, about half of whom are children. Though performances vary, the children as a group do well, generally behaving like children. This is evidenced particularly in a fight scene where a pitched battle was realistically, and enthusiastically, joined. Good performances are turned in by the adult members of the cast who show considerable comic and dramatic skill in the various roles.

John Conklin's scenery is simple but imaginative and clever. Using minimal visual materials, he creates effective backdrops that suggest the locus of each scene.

All in all, *Emil and the Detectives* is superior fare for young audiences from 5 to 12. Or as our 9-year old companion summed it up "Great!"

Mary Mayer