

WPCC play is delightful

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"Wiley and the Hairy Man," presented by the acting class of Western Piedmont Community College, is delightful. The play is exciting, suspenseful, humorous and clever. The production is skillful, artistic and witty.

In a style and rhythm reminiscent of James Whitcomb Riley's "Little Orphant Annie" ("The goggle-uns'll git ye

Ef you
Don't
Watch
Out!").

a chorus, composed of Linda Anne Old-Payne, David McGee and Richard Epley, narrates and participates in the tale. The three narrators provide tone, build suspense, comment, dance and even serve as a tree and a sack for holding a 'possum. With the aid of musical accompaniment, they maintain the rhythm of the story. They also reflect Wiley's fear of the Hairy Man and then celebrate with laughter as the young protagonist outwits his opponent.

Wiley, played by Kathy Braswell (no sex-role stereotypes in this play), at first expresses trepidation in the face of the Hairy Man, who is portrayed quite believably by Dennis Jones. But Wiley and his Mammy, Edward Max, connive to outsmart the dreadful swamp creature. And they do trick him, not once but three times, reminding the spectator of Brer Rabbit's encounters with Brer Fox.

In the mode of readers' theater, the scenery doesn't even pretend realism,

but the characters make us believe that black boxes are trees and beds and that a folding screen is a house.

We also see imaginary axes and dogs. Characters enter and exit from all passageways, helping the audience to feel involved in the action. Eerie, suspenseful music, provided by Louise White on piano and Catherine Wheeler playing various percussion instruments, contributes to the atmosphere of a dark, frightening swamp. At the end of the play, the music has a bluegrass flavor, bringing us to the revelry of a hoedown.

Cheryl Oxford, the director of the production, has shaped a class of students, amateurs at playmaking, into an excellent cast. Dennis Jones is quite frightening as the Hairy Man (I jumped more than once). Although once or twice I missed a couple of her lines, Kathy Braswell uses an amusing accent — "Eb'm ropes that ties dawgs up?"

Linda Anne Old-Payne keeps the chorus in rhythm, and her wide-eyed expression contributes to the audience's fear of the Hairy Man. Edward Max is good in his role, although I was disappointed that Jack Stokes, who wrote the play, made the Mammy

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even more stereotypical than Scarlett O'Hara's: black, large and unbelievably buxom. The players never step out of character, and they act rather than merely recite lines.

Everyone, especially families with elementary school children, should attend this play. Children will be enthralled by the suspense and excitement; adults will appreciate the wit, skill and artistry.

"Wiley and the Hairy Man" should not be Western Piedmont's last production.

— Katherine Grimes