



## Review: Mill Town stages rambunctious ‘Robin Hood’

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Mill Town Players’ production of “Robin Hood” continues through Nov. 8. Pictured are, left to right, Aaron Pennington, Noah George and Drew Whitley.(Photo: Wallace Krebs)

The Mill Town Players bring a playful, rambunctious spirit to the timeless tale of “Robin Hood” at the Pelzer Auditorium.

As children’s theater, the 75-minute production succeeds splendidly, with broad acting and high-velocity pacing guaranteed to captivate youthful attention spans.

“Robin Hood” has been adapted in countless ways — in ballads and for stage, TV and film — throughout the centuries. This version, created by Greg Banks for children’s theaters in Seattle and Minneapolis, is played mostly for laughs.

The setup is fetching: Five young beggars arrive at the Pelzer Auditorium, seeking food and a few coins. To pass the time and perhaps distract themselves from their own misfortunes, they proceed to act out the story of their hero, Robin Hood, the legendary protector of the poor and downtrodden.

As their one-act play begins, it appears that wealthy land barons are oppressing the common folk. In leaps Robin Hood to battle on their behalf, fighting the Sheriff of Nottingham and the evil Prince John, all the while striving to win the heart of Maid Marian.

One of the creative conceits of the play, which opened Friday, is that the “beggars” relate the story of Robin Hood with items they come across in what appears to be an old, dilapidated theater.

Thus, Robin Hood’s bow is a coat-hanger. “Sword” fights, meanwhile, are negotiated with canes, brooms and umbrellas.

The story is played against the backdrop of Will Ragland’s evocative scenic design: a marble arch defaced by graffiti and flanked by two, decrepit wooden balconies — potent symbols of social and political decay.

Jay Briggs’ staging is vigorous and frothy, boasting a fair measure of physical humor. He endows the play with a restless, almost frenetic, energy. Briggs’ production barrels forward with no intermission to break the headlong momentum.

This “Robin Hood” also can’t be contained within the bounds of the stage. The actors sometimes run up and down the aisles, and elicit audience assistance in the plot.

Briggs’ five young actors, with each playing two or more characters, are terrific — nimble and forthright. On opening night, I particularly enjoyed Cara Ann Hendsbee’s irrepressible Maid Marian.

Deft contributions are provided also by Drew Whitley (Robin Hood, Marian’s Dad), Aaron Pennington (Prince John, Will Scarlett) and Noah George (Sheriff, King Richard).

Michael Lewis portrays Muso and also offers some tasty riffs on the guitar throughout the show, a pleasing reference perhaps to the origin of the Robin Hood legend among 15th century balladeers.

The play suggests at one point that Robin Hood or at least his spirit may be still out there, “protecting the poor, looking out for the needy.”

Let’s hope so.

The Mill Town Players’ dynamic production of “Robin Hood” continues through Nov. 8. For tickets, call 864-947-8000 or see the website [www.milltownplayers.org](http://www.milltownplayers.org).

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