

Blue Curtains Brisbane

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by Meredith Walker

Freaky family fun

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Freaky Friday (Beenleigh Theatre Group)

Crete Street Theatre

June 17 – July 2



The musical comedy “Freaky Friday” is based on the celebrated novel by Mary Rodgers and the hit Disney films of the same name. Though a contemporary update, the mother-daughter body-switching story follows much the same storyline with its rousing opening number ‘Just One Day’ introducing the characters and setting up the narrative.

11th grader Ellie Blake (Carly Wilson) wants nothing more than to participate in The Hunt, an annual all-night scavenger hunt that she’s determined to win because her crush Adam (Elliot Gough) is the new List Master. Her only problem is that it is set to take place on the night of her busy widowed mother Katherine’s (Della Days) wedding rehearsal dinner. As the equally frustrated and angry mother and daughter fight and plead for each other to change, tension crescendos to their shared grip of a giant hourglass and suddenly, neither of them is the same as they once were. And so begins the very freaky Friday that sees them journeying in each other’s bodies (and discovering more about each other’s lives), full of hilarity as the duo scramble to assimilate to the new experiences that ensue.



The supporting cast is excellent. Kirsten Sparks is of particular note as one of Ellie’s best friends, goggle-eyed and jelly-kneed in her own adoration in presence of the adorably cool Adam, while AJ Betts brings a commanding stage presence to villainous mean-girl Savannah. This is, however, Wilson and more so, Days’ show and it is their performances that define it. Days inhabits the role of a mother inhabited by a flanneletted and angsty teenager usually bickering with her younger puppet-obsessed brother Fletcher (Samuel Barrett). Through changing vocal tones and physicality, she captures the hyperbole and chaos of her teenage daughter’s daily dilemmas, but also, as things progress, reveals her growing maturity in appreciation of her mother’s stresses. Indeed, Days demonstrates

excellent comic timing in her play of a sassy teenager trapped inside an adult body, especially in Katherine's resulting attempts to quash shows of affection from her fiancé Mike (Mike Zarate). Days' vocal prowess is touching and powerful as required, combining wonderfully with Wilson's equally commanding signing voice for a bluesy 'Bring My Baby (Brother) Home', Act Two's show-stopper.



Like a Disney style "Heathers", "Freaky Friday" is full of catchy songs (music by Tom Kitt and song lyrics by Brian Yorkey), brought to versatile life by an accomplished orchestra whose back of stage reveal in encore is to much audience acclaim. Steven Days' musical direction celebrates the varied sensibilities of the score, such as Act One's 'I've Got This', where the two decide that they have to pretend to be one another until a second magical hourglass can be found, both thinking that the other's life is easier, which has a swaying calyso feel. This makes moments when the music overwhelms ensemble vocals, such as in 'Oh Biology,' all the more frustrating.



Clay English's choreography is lively, elevating ensemble scenes such as school numbers and the second act scavenger hunt. Scenes similarly switch briskly between domestic and high school locations, aided by Sherryl-Lee Secomb set design of simple outlined stage pieces (like in a comic book), which sees kitchen cabinets easily rotate into high school lockers, allowing for both swift transitions and for the strong performances of its two leads to appropriately take centre stage. Attention to detail in costuming is also commendable in its role in conveying the changed personas of mother and daughter, as, for example, the mother in daughter Ellie's body no longer carries her backpack over one shoulder and the teenager now in her mother's body doesn't take long to tie a jacket around her waist.

"Freaky Friday" is a fabulous musical, full of fun for all. Under Secomb's dynamic direction, the family-friendly show offers Beenleigh audiences a triple treat of talented cast, infectious songs and lively musical numbers. There is some lovely messaging too, not just as the duo discover their unique strengths and learn to love and appreciate each other anew, but through 'teenager' Ellie's urge to her teenage friends not to be ashamed of their bodies, which makes it even more worthy of a visit.

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