

Arnold Lobel's FABLES as Musical Theatre

I have composed music for Arnold Lobel's FABLES. These musical FABLES can either be presented theatrically, or as recorded video or cinema on a screen. I'm going to write a few words here about how the FABLES might be presented on stage. Of course, there are thousands of ways a director might approach this project.

Here is one approach:

- First of all, there are 20 discreet FABLES, each with its own Title, Body and Moral.
 - Though there are many resonances between the various FABLES, there is no single story thru-line that extends between and across the FABLES. What happens to the Crocodile in the first FABLE is not connected by story to what happens to the Mouse in the last FABLE.
 - Therefore, the overall arch of the show is not about a single story embodied within the FABLES. There are twenty discrete stories.
 - However, it will be possible to present an implicit and fun meta-story involving the Actors and Musicians and other theatre pros working together to cleverly use the materials at hand to build and rebuild the sets and tableaux necessary to the FABLES.
 - This intensely theatrical meta-story will impart a unity to the show, making a virtue of the theatrical challenges presented by the diverse FABLES.
- When we are inside a FABLE we are totally consumed with the realization of that FABLE.
 - Between FABLES there is room to play with this self-consciously theatrical meta-story.
- I am envisioning a cast of four or five singing actors.
 - Every FABLE has a singing part for the lead Narrator.
 - There are also anywhere from one to four singing Animals in each FABLE.
 - The most common situation is a FABLE with Narration and two Animal characters.
 - One specific actor will always be singing the lead Narrator role.
 - The other actors will either be assigned an Animal role or will supplement the lead Narrator with sung harmonies and counterpoint.

- All the actors are of course available for any stage business deemed useful by the director.

- I am imagining a largely bare stage with a flagpole downstage right.

- Many large differently shaped 3-dimensional blocks can be stacked strategically between and during each FABLE to dynamically create an appropriate staging of each FABLE.

- For instance, in “The Crocodile in the Bedroom”, we’ll need the Crocodile’s bed and a wall for his wallpaper. Then we’ll need a doorway through which Mrs. Crocodile visits the bedroom and for Mr. Crocodile to exit through into the garden. These items can be built of or suggested by the blocks (and other materials as deemed useful) on stage.

- If we have an extra actor or two available on any given FABLE, these actors might find themselves deployed much as the blocks are deployed, as part of the set or tableaux.

- Or maybe the director will think of something else to do with them. For instance, they can be deployed to embody various power centers in the FABLE, like the wallpaper and wild garden flowers in “The Crocodile in the Bedroom” or the storm-tossed sea in “The Lobster and the Crab”.

- There is no limit to the actor’s creative deployment.

- Before each FABLE, an illustrated banner specific to that FABLE will be run up the flagpole.

- Perhaps this banner can be constructed as a large bag with a zipper, containing any props and costume items necessary to its FABLE.

- Empty the bag, deal with the minimal costuming and props, set up the blocks.

- Finally, run the banner/bag up the flagpole.

- While still outside the FABLE, the entire cast will sing the FABLE’s Title.

- Then the FABLE will be presented, deploying actors as discussed above.

- During each FABLE, I am not imagining a lot of motion around the stage by Narrator or Animals.

- Because of this relatively static situation onstage during each FABLE, there will be room for the Musician(s) to share the stage with the Narrator and Animals.

- I'm imagining the Musician(s) downstage left. Of course, differently sized stages offer different opportunities and challenges.
- Musicians could be off-stage if necessary. However, these are very musical FABLES, and it somehow feels right to me to have the musicians be inside the presentation rather than outside.

- At the end of each FABLE, the entire cast will sing that FABLE's Moral.

- Between FABLES everyone will scurry about, attending to constructing tableaux for the next FABLE out of blocks, taking care of any costuming adjustments, procuring and deploying props from the prop bag/banner, and lastly running the banner for the next FABLE up the flagpole.
- Watching this transformative process could prove to be a lot of fun for the Audience.

- Rinse and repeat for all twenty FABLES.

- The music for the FABLES averages about four minutes per FABLE (the shortest FABLE around three minutes, the longest around seven minutes).
- Thus, there are about 80 minutes of FABLES music.
- I don't know how long the transitions will take between FABLES.
 - It may be fun to do these transitions very quickly. I guess I'm thinking something like 30 second transitions. That adds about ten minutes to the show.

- So, we have a 90-minute show in one or two acts.

- If a shorter show is desirable, it would be possible to present less than all of the FABLES. In this sense, there is a great deal of flexibility in tailoring a show to different Audiences of different ages, who of course may come to the theatre with different attention spans.

That's a good first look at what I'm thinking concerning a theatrical presentation of these musical settings of Arnold Lobel's FABLES. Once they are on their feet, their expression will no doubt take on a life of its own.

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