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## Youth Onstage! is a star act

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*Special to the AmNews*

"Robin Hood: A Political Romance," being presented and performed by Youth Onstage! at the All Stars Project on 42nd Street, may feature a youthful cast of 22, mainly ages 14-21, but it is not children's work. It is an intense, humorous, well-written, directed and acted piece, which

This play is not suitable for an audience under 10 because of the harsh language, but the language is appropriate for what the characters are expressing.

Friedman takes the story of Robin Hood and gives Robin and his Merry Men a very human side. One of the Merry Men — filled with jealousy — betrays Robin Hood, something that didn't happen in the Robin Hood movies with Errol Flynn that most of us are familiar with or in the Disney tale. Friedman had to show the human and at times flawed side of these characters to make his point more poignant, that there is such a huge disparity between the rich and the poor and it's a space that can't be bridged by just words and a little action.

In the end, Friedman's Robin Hood does become a noble and marry Maid Marian, but amidst his happiness we also realize that the wife of one of his Merry Men is killed trying

to rally the people to save Robin Hood when he is imprisoned. And, in Friedman's "Robin Hood," as the new noble goes off to live happily, his Merry Men are pardoned, but wounded and still poor as they hobble off to resume their pitiful lives.

There are so many elements to this play that keep bringing home all the drama and tragedy in the characters' lives. One of the elements is a clever device of Friedman's, as he has a girl sing short songs with candid lyrics, about the troubles of the characters.

Everything about this play perfectly comes together to make it an entertaining and enlightening experience. There really isn't enough praise

to say about this cast. Michael Alcide gives a dramatic and powerful performance as the Sheriff of Nottingham. Peter Graham is perfect as the delightfully evil Prince John, who neither cares for his people nor his brother, King Richard. Alethea Rivera is charming as Maid Marian. Zenobia Shroff is very captivating as Mother Agatha, Marian's trusted advisor. Franceli Chapman is amusing and interesting as Friar Tuck. Serge Velez is marvelous as Frederick, a Merry Man with a passion for killing, but could also be angered enough to betray a friend.

Antoine Joyce is absolutely marvelous as the sword fighting, robbing from the rich, giving to himself and then the poor hero, Robin Hood. He clearly lets the audience see different sides of the character, including his discomfort at acting in league with nobility. When Joyce isn't on stage, he is the national producer of the All Stars Talent Show Network.

When you leave the theater you'll find you have been entertained, but also educated. And, you'll realize that Youth Onstage! is doing incredibly positive things with cultivating young and talented performers.

"Robin Hood: A Political Romance," which features wonderful puppets designed by Nick Jones, sword fights choreographed by Michael Ou, lovely period costumes by Amy Nicole Banner, and musical direction and scenic design by Christian Claas, who is also the featured musician in the show, will play through March 26. Tickets are \$15. To purchase them call 212-941-1234.



From left: Maid Marian (Alethea Rivera) and Robin Hood (Antoine "RL" Joyce) in the Youth Onstage! production of Robin Hood: A Political Romance.

looks at a very real issue — the difference between the rich and poor. It looks at the frustrations of and injustices endured by the poor.

The acting in this play is absolutely superb! This young, multi-ethnic cast proves to be all marvelous actors who not only demonstrate the craft and create an engaging, entertaining story, but also have fun with it. There are many parts of this production that will stick with you because they are either funny, clever or filled with emotion.

There was truly a delight in store every time the Punch and Judy puppet show cart came out. Actors and puppeteers Armando Newhold and Angela Elsa Lamouth speak in rhymes as they perform funny puppet shows which tell of the issues being addressed at particular times throughout the play.

This play was written by Dan Friedman, the artistic director of Youth Onstage! 25 years ago, but it is not outdated in any way. In fact, Friedman has the characters speak in very real language, sometimes filled with profanity and slang, to describe the frustrations they are experiencing.



From left: The Sheriff of Nottingham (Michael Alcide) and Robin Hood (Antoine "RL" Joyce) in the climactic sword fight from the Youth Onstage! production of Robin Hood: A Political Romance. (Photo Roger Grunwald)