

'Queen Lucia' reigns at Lifeline in musical satire

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Lifeline Theatre has long presented musical adaptations of children's books for its KidSeries shows, but it has never produced a musical on its mainstage. That all changes with the opening of Christina Calvit's adaptation of E.F. Benson's Queen Lucia, featuring original songs by George Howe.

Keeping with what it does best – stage adaptations of novels – Lifeline adds a musical twist to Benson's comic satire of 1920s English society. Calvit, who has written many adaptations for Lifeline, including "Jane Eyre" and "Pride and Prejudice," here transforms the tale of arch-snob Emmeline Lucas, the ruthless ruler of her English town.

Director Frances Limoncelli knew Howe was the perfect match to write the songs. A longtime collaborator at Lifeline, Howe has written music for many of the children's shows, including "Giggle, Giggle, Quack," currently running through June 19.

"When considering who might do the songs, I knew that George had been writing songs for 20 years," said Limoncelli. "And all who know him have wondered when he would finally write a [mainstage] musical."

Previews of "Queen Lucia" continue through Thursday; opens June 10 and continues through July 24 at Lifeline Theatre, 6912 N. Glenwood. Tickets: (773) 761-1772.

FEUDIN' FAMILIES: Lookingglass Theatre closes out its season with Rick Sims' and Heidi Stillman's Hillbilly Antigone, a musical filled with Sims' original songs in the style of the Carter Family. Loosely based on Sophocles' classic Greek drama, the strange, intriguing work is a perfect fit for Lookingglass, where producing new work is the mission. Set in the mountains of Kentucky, Sims and Stillman, who also directs, weave a story of people grappling with their sense of self and their way of life. Opens Saturday and continues through July 10 at Lookingglass Theatre in Water Tower Water Works, 821 N. Michigan. Tickets: (312) 337-0665.

POLITICAL SCIENCE: David C. Field's Symmetry is the story of a brilliant young physicist determined to escape the obscurity of his small southwestern university. But powerful forces are equally determined to keep him there. The cast includes Dan Lauria, who played the father on the television series "The Wonder Years." Opens Monday and continues through July 10 at Victory Gardens Theater, 2257 N. Lincoln. Tickets: (773) 871-3000.

MAGICAL MUSICAL: Light Opera Works teams with the Actors Gymnasium to present Bob Merrill and Michael Stewart's Carnival! The musical, which hasn't been produced professionally in Chicago since the early 1960s, tells the story of a lonely orphan who finds love among the performers of the Grand Imperial Cirque du Paris. The score includes "Love Makes the World Go Round." Michael Ehrman directs. Opens Saturday, to June 12 at Cahn Auditorium, 600 Emerson, Evanston. Tickets: (847) 869-6300.

SHELL GAME: Beau O'Reilly's newest work, The Turtle at Play, is a dark comedy about a science-addled slacker who finds a huge land turtle. Meanwhile, his partner lands a job in a seedy club and the late-night routine begins to take over their lives. O'Reilly directs. Opens tonight, to June 26 at Prop Thtr, 3504 N. Elston. Tickets: (773) 267-6660.

ALSO PLAYING: Michael Gazzo's drama A Hatful of Rain. Opens tonight, to July 16 at Raven Theatre, 6157 N. Clark. Tickets: (773) 338-2177 ... Vicki Quade's Put the Nuns in Charge, a spinoff of the hit comedy, "Late Nite Catechism." Opens Saturday in an open run at Royal George Theatre, 1641 N. Halsted. Tickets: (312) 988-9000 ... Speaking Ring

Theatre's Vitality One-Act Festival. Opens tonight, to June 11 at Holy Covenant United Methodist Church, 925 W. Diversey. (312) 458-9374 ... Caffeine Theatre's work-in-progress, Silva. Opens Monday, to June 21 at Breadline Theatre, 1802 W. Berenice. Tickets: (773) 561-7611.

Caption: Georgie Pillson (Jamie Axtell, right) and his friend Lucia Lucas (Elise Kauzlaric) keep their eyes on the neighbors in Lifeline Theatre's "Queen Lucia."

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