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BACKSTAGE

Learning to spread his wings
Kennedy Center's "Icarus Jackson" lets imagination fly free. **C2**

BACKSTAGE

Imaginations take off in 'Wings of Icarus Jackson'

Creative production shows young minds how to soar

BY JESSICA GOLDSTEIN

"The Wings of Icarus Jackson," onstage at the Kennedy Center through Thursday, is based on Christopher Myers's picture book "Wings." "Wings" inverts the original Greek myth of Icarus, the boy who flew with wings his father crafted from feathers and wax. When Icarus soared too close to the sun, the wax melted, and he fell into the sea and drowned.

Icarus Jackson — Icarus reimagined as a celebration of individuality — encourages the opposite. He's a city kid with wings who wants to stay grounded and has to find a way to accept the fact that he's built to fly. It's a Lady Gaga twist: Instead of defying his nature, he learns to embrace it. He was born that way.

"It was important to me that he be this very magical being, in a sense. He's definitely in this world where he doesn't fit in," said Devanand Janki, the show's director and choreographer.

Of course — gravity-related spoiler alert! — the actor playing Icarus can't actually fly. Janki and Cyana Paolantonio, the associate choreographer, use dance and strategic staging to give the impression of flight.

"The Kennedy Center wanted a way to create flight without it turning into 'Spider-Man' and having to fly someone," Janki said. "For me, it's all about integrating music and story and movement. It was an interesting challenge because it's not a play, it's not a musical, it's not a ballet. . . . I wanted it to be seamless."

"It's very visual, just like the book," Paolantonio said. "We do a lot of playing with levels. . . . If Icarus is traveling up these stairs and platforms, we have the other characters using modern dance, really grounded and tight into the floor." Projections also play on the illusion of movement.

Paolantonio has been in the audience for almost every show and says kids watching the perform-

ance "seem to really get it. . . . And that's great because they can go home and put on shows for themselves. They can see that they don't need a fancy rigging system to communicate the story from their own fairy tales."

Through Thursday, 2700 F St. NW, www.kennedy-center.org, 202-467-4600.

Round House in 2012-13

When Blake Robison, Round House Theater's artistic director, is deciding on the first play of the season, he likes to pick "something very cutting edge and bold," he said. "Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo," 2012's opener, will be enjoying its area premiere this September.

"It takes contemporary issues surrounding war and morality and what's going on in all parts of the world today and weaves them into an imaginative, theatrical fantasia," Robison said.

"I Love to Eat" will be an area premiere when it is produced at Round House in October. The one-person play starring Nick Alcott is based on the life of James Beard. "He was the original TV chef," Robison said. "Before Julia Child." Alcott has worked as a director all over Washington, but this will be his first appearance onstage in more than 10 years.

The holiday season will bring "Young Robin Hood," a world-premiere adaptation of the famous story casting one of the original champions of the 99 percent (takes from the rich, gives to the poor) as a teenager.

"Glengarry Glen Ross" will follow, opening in February 2013. "We wanted to fill the play with a strong, local cast," said Robison. "It's not an exaggeration to say these are the A-listers of 30-to-50-something men in the city." The cast includes Rick Fouchoux, Alexander Strain, KenYatta Rogers, James Konicek, Jefferson Russell and Conrad Feinger, and will be directed by Mitchel Hebert, who was recently seen onstage at Forum Theatre in "The Language Archive."

The musical "I Do! I Do!" directed by Nick Alcott will open in April 2013, followed by "Sherlock Holmes and the Adventure of the Suicide Club." Jeffrey Hatcher's script takes a Robert Louis Stevenson short story and re-imagines the



CAROL PRATT

'WINGS': Lynette Rathnam and Andreu Honeycutt star in the play based on Christopher Myers's reverse spin on the Greek myth of a boy who wanted to fly.

work as a new Holmes thriller.

The current season is Robison's last; though he selected the plays for 2012-13, a new artistic director will be announced by the end of this season. Robison, who has been with Round House for seven of the 10 years the theater has spent at its Bethesda location, will become the artistic director of Cincinnati's Playhouse in the Park.

The fantastic four

Teatro de la Luna has an ambitious winter season planned: four plays from four countries in just four weeks.

"It's not easy," allowed Nucky Walder, a producer on the theater's board of directors. "But it's possible!"

Three of the four productions are one-person shows. "Family Under Construction," the play from Factiva Teatro of Spain, features five actors. "Financially, it's much less difficult to bring in a one-man or one-woman show," Walder said.

"The Immigrant," from Costa Rica, will open the season Thursday. "It's such an important subject, not only for the Latino community but also for the English-speaking audience," Walder said. "The Immigrant" has been produced at Teatro de la Luna twice before, in 2005 and 2006.

The Argentine production "I Can't Live Without a Maid" will follow "Family Under Construction." "Maid" is a humorous but incisive take on the domestic-help

industry, performed by actor-playwright-director Perla Laske.

"Petru: All by Himself" from Uruguay, will finish out the season. Petru Valenski has worked with Teatro de la Luna multiple times, having previously performed in its International Festival of Hispanic Theater.

The name of this four-week stretch, "The Moon's Embrace," comes from "the way we express our feelings: with the heart," Walder said. "Usually, when we end our letters or our phone [conversations] we always say 'abrazo,' which means 'hug' or 'embrace.'"

All performances are in Spanish with either English dubbing or sur-titles.

'Red' is seeing green

"Red," the Tony Award-winning drama about abstract expressionist painter Mark Rothko, has become the highest-grossing non-musical in Arena Stage's history.

The production, done in association with Chicago's Goodman Theatre, is directed by Goodman's artistic director, Robert Falls, and stars Edward Gero as Rothko and Patrick Andrews as Ken, Rothko's fictional assistant.

"Red" has claimed the "highest grossing" title from another production with a Chicago company: Mary Zimmerman's "The Arabian Nights," which ran on the Fichandler Stage last season.

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