Instruction and Delight in Moses Goldberg's Plays for the Maturing Child

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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Anthony L. Manna
The theatre is not a set of separate kinds of plays for different ages, but a continuous art form, inviting an increasing sophistication.

Moses Goldberg, *Children’s Theatre: A Philosophy and A Method*

Throughout his careers as a children's playwright and as a director of children's theatre, Moses Goldberg has focused on the personal and aesthetic development of children as audience members. Drawing on his training in developmental psychology, Goldberg has attempted to delineate the stages and changes that characterize children's needs and interests in the theatre in light of both their emotional and intellectual development and their natural inclination, from a very early age, to represent and interpret their experiences through play and dramatization.

 Appropriately, he calls his approach Developmental Theatre, a concept that encompasses a consideration of the evolution and history of theatre as a social phenomenon and the ways in which theatre affects the perceptions and attitudes of the playgoers. In his essay "The Theatre: A Side View," Goldberg posed the questions that guide the practitioner of Developmental Theatre: "How does the theatre become increasingly relevant to the life of the growing individual?" and "How does the art of theatre emerge from our basic inner needs?" (127; 128).

Questions such as these, Goldberg believes, would require a change in the perspective from which theatre critics usually operate. Traditionally, the tendency has been to describe what Goldberg has called the "surface manifestations of theatre," such as forms and styles of presentation and play text. In contrast, a critic approaching dramatic art from a developmental perspective would be concerned with theatre as an ongoing process, examining, for example, the transformations that theatre has gone through in various eras of history, and the stages in aesthetic maturation that can be nurtured by the theatre experience.

In order to investigate the latter—namely, how aesthetic maturity
develops in the theatre—Goldberg has argued for the establishment of a theatre that would function as an experimental research laboratory, in which the expertise and methods of the theatre artist and the behavioral scientist would be used to discover how particular characteristics of plays affect audience members at different stages in their development, and, consequently, how specific characteristics of the playgoer can guide theatre artists in their effort to develop plays that are both entertaining and personally relevant. For example, the playwright who works in a developmental theatre laboratory could study such factors as the nature of the audience's identification with stage characters of varying ages, its responses to particular performance styles, play topics and themes, and the degree to which the age of the playgoer determines his or her response.

It is within this philosophical and artistic framework that Goldberg continues to develop what he has described in Children's Theatre: A Philosophy and A Method as "a 'master plan' for the child's theatrical exposure" (101). Translated into theatre practice, Goldberg's plan is a carefully sequenced continuum of theatre experiences that is rooted in his sense of the changing needs, concerns, and interests of children from early childhood through adolescence. The author of over twenty plays and the director of at least twice that number, Goldberg has developed his theatre pieces for specific audiences in order to nurture their sophistication as playgoers and to increase their knowledge of various theatre forms and styles. And although he has been critical of practitioners of children's theatre in this country who, in merely setting out to cater to the interests of children, sacrifice sincerity to marketability, he believes it is possible to write for children without necessarily writing down to them. He addressed this issue in Children's Theatre: A Philosophy and A Method when he wrote

It is not wrong to know one's audience . . . . What is wrong, in my opinion, is to allow one's conceptions of the audience to dictate completely the material and treatment of the play . . . . The creative artist's first duty, as anti-social as it may seem, is to
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By Anthony L. Manna

The theatre is not a set of separate kinds of plays for different ages, but a continuous art form, involving an increasing sophistication.

Moses Goldberg, in his book "Children's Theatre: A Philosophy and A Method," believes that the development of a child's imagination and the growth of his ideas and emotions are integral to his development. He stresses the importance of the theatre in providing opportunities for children to express themselves and to develop their creative abilities. Goldberg argues that children's theatre should be a means of communication and expression for them and that it should be designed to meet the needs of the child as he develops. He sees the theatre as a means of helping children to understand the world around them and to develop empathy and understanding of others.

Goldberg's philosophy of children's theatre is based on the idea that children are active participants in the theatre experience. He believes that the theatre should be a place where children can express themselves and where they can learn about themselves and others.

Goldberg's plays are designed to be performed by younger children first experiencing live theater. "The Changeling," "Robin Hood," "The Muffat's Mystery," and "The Adventures of Maury and Mike" are examples of his work. These plays are designed to meet the needs of the child and to be performed by children themselves. Goldberg's plays are characterized by their simplicity and directness, and they are designed to be performed in a way that is accessible to children.

Goldberg is a pioneer in the field of children's theatre and his work has had a significant impact on the development of this art form. His philosophy and methods have been influential in shaping the way children's theatre is performed and have contributed to the development of a unique style of children's theatre that is different from adult theatre.
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