

# Raton Youth Theater rocks the Shuler

By **TIM KELLER**  
The Chronicle-News

Raton Youth Theater spent the entire month of July in daily half-day rehearsals to bring "The Adventures of Dr. Dolittle" to the Shuler stage for four performances last weekend. It was time well spent, and the essence of great community theater: three-dozen local kids, from 8-18, singing and dancing and delivering great comic lines, all while dressed up as animals and cannibals and pirates. The audiences got more than their money's worth.

Elliott Baker's musical comedy draws on Hugh Lofting's Newbery Medal-winning story of a distracted British doctor more in tune with animals than people. Ian McCabe played Dr. Dolittle here, and he was the only adult on the heavily-populated stage. Dolittle is a softy who can't refuse an animal in need. This leads him from England to Africa, from the British winter to the hot African jungle, then puts him and his friends aboard a hostile pirate ship, to boot.

It was all great fun, with uniformly-excellent performances by the young cast members. There is an adage that cau-



Photos by Tim Keller

Dr. Dolittle effects a truce between the Pirate King and the Cannibal King as interested parties look on.



Spencer Willden's Cannibal King, left, is amused as Dr. Dolittle, played by Ian McCabe, tries to negotiate with Zoe Gomez's Cannibal Queen.



Polynesia the parrot, played by Beki Henson, explains the variety of animal languages to Ian McCabe's Dr. Dolittle.



Stone Phillips' Pirate King is a song and dance man, singing in front of his chorus line to the direction of music director Bill Crary.



"The Adventures of Dr. Dolittle," animals talk, dance, and sing. Three-dozen Raton youth took to the Shuler stage last weekend.

tions directors to never work with children or animals: they're too hard to control. Here, training dozens of young neophytes must have been like wrangling monkeys, but stage director Gail Dixon-Willden always shines with children, bringing out impressive qualities the kids probably didn't know they had. Music director Bill Crary even taught them all to sing layered vocal arrangements for the play's many songs.

As Crary himself points out, Raton's vibrant theatre scene has produced a rich crop of experienced actors of all ages, and many of this production's young actors and singers were no beginners. Crary gave singing auditions for all the roles that sang solo parts, and he had plenty of talent from which to choose. The singing was impressive throughout, though it was sometimes difficult to hear the still-small voices in the rear of the theater.

The costumes have to take star billing in this production. It's challenging enough to effectively clothe characters, but here those characters were pirates, cannibals, and animals - birds, monkeys, crocodiles, dogs, a pig, and even a two-headed antelope. Ursula Garcia, Misty Gomez, and Dixon-Willden created fabulous costumes that undoubtedly went far in helping the young actors go all the way into their characters. Many parents also pitched in to help the costumers realize their vision. It worked.

The community of Raton has an asset here that cannot be overstated, and it's exciting to imagine the future as the town's many young talents develop and Raton Youth Theater continues producing show after show. The month of July was essentially a youth workshop in which students obviously developed many qualities and skills, including teamwork, responsibility, memorization, singing, dancing, poise, and confidence.

That makes it sound like work. In the weekend performances of "The Adventures of Dr. Dolittle," it looked like pure fun. No wonder the kids keep coming back for more. Audiences will, too.

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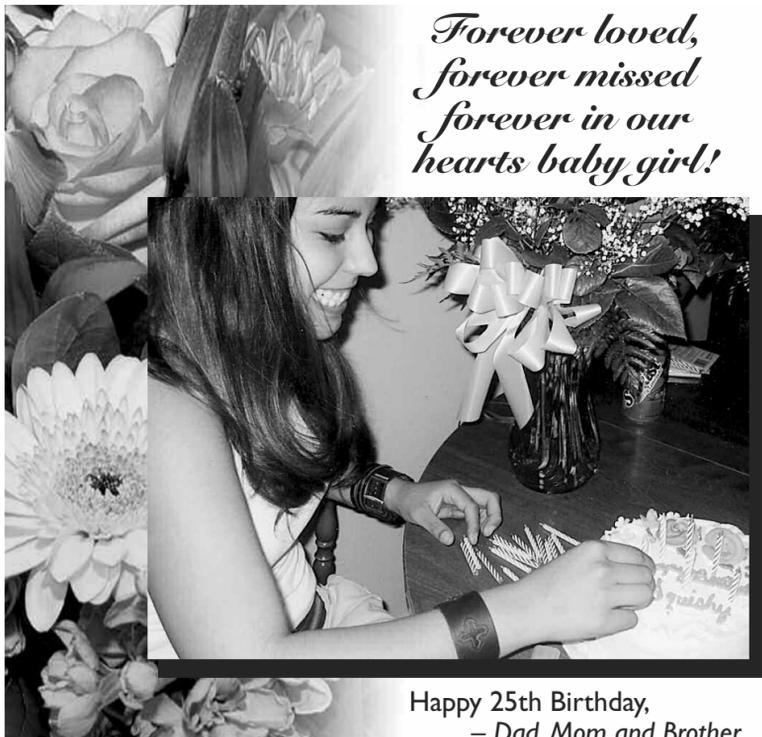
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**- Dad, Mom and Brother**