

An Introduction.

Good evening, I'm Reilly Bresnahan. I'm one of the storytellers selected to bring you at home on a journey with us the porter players as we present the Wizards of Oz. I welcome you on behalf of my co-student director, Emma Forbes, and our faculty directors Dr. Gilbert and Ms. Musich. Before we step aside so that you can enjoy the songs and dances from *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Wiz*, and *Wicked*, Aidan, Brooke, Amelia, Sam, Bella, Jersie, and I would like to pay homage to the 120 year old children's book series that has inspired countless actors, musicians, technicians, and of course, student-artists.

Starting his work as an author at the age of 40, L. Frank Baum wrote fourteen books chronicling Dorothy Gale's multiple trips to the merry old land of Oz. The books were written and published while Baum and his family lived in Chicago, Illinois. Prior to becoming the best selling children's author in the country, Baum was struggling to make enough money to keep his family out of poverty. In fact, he moved them from New York to Chicago in the 1880s because he thought the barren midwest of America was the land of opportunity.

L. Frank Baum set out to create entertaining, joyful books for American children who at the time read only European literature. European fairy tales were frightening, cautionary tales with obvious moral messages. And although Baum didn't make it through more than a few years at his east coast boarding school, and didn't graduate from school, he thought that by the turn of the twentieth century the American education system took care of teaching morality and citizenship, so books for children could simply be fun.

Here is the introduction that Baum wrote for his first book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* published in 1900.

Folklore, legends, myths and fairy tales have followed childhood through the ages, for every healthy youngster has a wholesome and instinctive love for stories fantastic, marvelous and manifestly unreal. The winged fairies of Grimm and Andersen have brought more happiness to childish hearts than all other human creations.

Yet the old time fairy tale, having served for generations, may now be classed as "historical" in the children's library; for the time has come for a series of newer "wonder tales" in which the stereotyped genie, dwarf and fairy are eliminated, together with all the horrible and blood-curdling incidents devised by their authors to point a fearsome moral to each tale. Modern education includes morality; therefore the modern child seeks only entertainment in its wonder tales and gladly dispenses with all disagreeable incidents.

Having this thought in mind, the story of "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" was written solely to please children of today. It aspires to being a modernized fairy tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heartaches and nightmares are left out.

A sequel called *The Marvelous Land of Oz* was published in 1904 because Baum received countless letters asking for more tales of the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow. The reason for the popularity of the book and these characters? Of course they were charmingly fresh tales and families adored them, but truly, what made the Wizard the oz a household name? Musical theatre, of course. Historians from the Smithsonian to the Chicago Public Library, where original playbills and posters are curated, claim that it was the 1902 musical *The Wizard of Oz*, book and lyrics by L.Frank Baum, music composed Paul Tietjens, which premiered at the Grand Opera House in Chicago that skyrocketed the series to fame. Less than a year later the musical opened on Broadway and wowed audiences with the tornado scene and the field of singing and dancing all-girl poppies chorus.

American Musical Theatre at the time featured far away, exotic places like the rivers of Vienna or the Islands of the Caribbean, but this play took audiences from its humble start in Kansas to a completely fantastical place called Oz. The show and its sets glittered. The Tin Woodman and the Brainless Scarecrow were played by breakout stars David Montgomery and Fred Stone. The main character was a smart, powerful young girl, played by an unknown Anne Laughlin. Many stage plays of the time featured human actors as animals, but animals never spoke and the actors only pantomimed. So the Cowardly Lion was relegated to a bit part and Dorothy's beloved Toto was redrafted as a cow, named Imogine.

The musical played on Broadway for nine months and toured the nation for nearly nine years. In 1911 the play was available for stock companies to produce around the country. It was a favorite of amateur theatre groups for many years. But in 1939 came the MGM technicolor marvel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, making Judy Garland forever Dorothy, the character who like Little Red Riding Hood was told to follow the path, but when Dorothy strayed she was bravely fighting for her friends and her family and her home. She was a champion of children everywhere.

In 1942, the St. Louis Municipal Opera produced a staged version of the 1939 film. This is the musical that is produced by theatre troupes large and small to this day and it stays very faithful to the movie we all know and love. Our own Porter Players drama club performed the *Wizard of Oz* in 2005.

In tonight's performance you'll see three songs performed from this now classic musical. A trio of vocalists will take you somewhere over the rainbow, the quartet of gentlemen will share their optimistic voices and our soloist Aidan Callahan will teach us all about courage if he were king of the forest.

All the vocalists tonight are under the direction of Mr. Chad Goetz with student assistants Aidan Callahan and Norah Gillogly.

Along with selections from the 1942 *Wizard of Oz*, our Porter Player wizards will sing and dance on down the road with three selections from the Broadway musical entitled *The Wiz: The Super Soul Musical Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. This adaptation of the 1900 novel and its characters moved their home from a farm in Kansas to the streets of New York City. *The Wiz* also has a famous film component; the 1978 movie featured Diana Ross's amazing vocals and Michael Jackson's memorable dances, but this time the stage version actually came first. The 1975 Broadway production won seven tony awards including best musical.

The next adaptation to make its mark on Broadway was the 2003 *Wicked*. This telling of the tale from the perspectives of the good witch Glinda and the wicked witch Elphaba is based on the 1995 novel *Wicked* by Gregory Maguire. The plot mentions Dorothy Gale, but focuses on the now famous frenemies, as they vie for popularity and compete for notoriety, but also acknowledge the impact that one another has had on their lives and souls.

Tonight, from *The Wiz* you'll see two musical numbers choreographed by Ms. Jeni Donahue Smith: "Ease on Down the Road", dance captain Ronan Vales, and "Brand New Day", dance captain, Madeline Sanford. Miss Christy Carlson has choreographed "No Bad News" with dance captain, Paige Svoboda. These numbers will be performed on the east campus stage in front of sets designed by Mr. Ken Frykholm and built by our Scene Tech crew led by Zach Glowczynski and Lilliana Gonzalez.

Throughout this production you'll see two of the catchiest and cleverest songs from *Wicked*. A duet called "Loathing" that features roommates with more or less a sibling rivalry and then a solo Glinda celebrating the joy of her own celebrity but also admitting to the difficulties of responsibility in the song "Popular". Finally, closing the night, the seniors of our company will leave us with the beautiful and meaningful "Changed for Good".

And throughout the songs and dances, our storytellers will be back periodically to dramatize favorite scenes from the original book series that started it all.

Thanks for watching tonight's performance. We hope to remind you of childhood memories when you first met Dorothy and her friends and maybe inspire you to seek out another adaptation to watch, sing, or read for the first time.