

Spare Times: For Children

By Laurel Graeber

July 30, 2009

‘CLICK, CLACK, MOO’

According to a favorite theory in popular culture, if you give monkeys typewriters, one will eventually produce a work by Shakespeare. So what happens with similarly equipped cows?

You won’t get “Hamlet.” But you may end up with a union contract or at least a list of workplace grievances.

That’s the message in this very funny new musical, which echoes both “Charlotte’s Web” and “Lysistrata.” Each summer Theatreworks/USA puts on a free production, this time an adaptation of the picture book “Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type,” by Doreen Cronin, illustrated by Betsy Lewin (Simon & Schuster). In Ms. Cronin’s story Farmer Brown’s indignant herd uses an old typewriter to demand blankets in the cold barn. The farmer, though shocked, is as unmovable as a wagon mired in mud. The animals then refuse to give milk, and matters escalate.

But don’t worry about explaining to kids what a typewriter is. Billy Aronson, author of the show’s book, has made the means of communication a laptop that Farmer Brown (Drew McVety, above) has confiscated from Jenny (Sarah Katherine Gee), his visiting granddaughter. Jenny, a spunky character not in Ms. Cronin’s original tale, sides with the strikers and helps broaden the work’s appeal to school-age children, as does Mr. Aronson’s wit. The cows, for instance, discover MooTube.

They also have distinct personalities: Maddie (Kristy Cates), the instigator, gives mad cow a whole new meaning; the sweet Darlene (Gretchen Bieber) excels in making peace; and Loretta (Michael Thomas Holmes) is a bit slow but capable of rock-the-barn-rafters emotion.

The score by Brad Alexander (music) and Kevin Del Aguila (lyrics) includes not just the expected country tunes but also hip-hop for the strutting hens, which have a kind of gang rivalry with the cows; a power anthem for Loretta (who intones “I got a feelin’ in the pit of

all four of my stomachs”); and a funky number for the resident duck (DeMond B. Nason). The director, John Rando (“Urinetown”), manages to, well, milk the most from this talented cast.

A few serious themes emerge. “Click, Clack, Moo” is a tribute to compromise, as well as an introduction to labor relations. And as the farmer rushes to negotiate under the threat of foreclosure, it even becomes a lesson in today’s economics. (Fridays, and Sundays through Thursdays, through Aug. 28 at the Lucille Lortel Theater, 121 Christopher Street, West Village. Free tickets available one hour before showtime, first come first served. Full schedule: twusa.org.) **LAUREL GRAEBER**

FOR CHILDREN

‘ADVENTURES WITH DORA AND DIEGO’ (Friday through Sunday, and Tuesday through Thursday) The young Latino stars of the Nickelodeon animated television series “Dora the Explorer” and “Go, Diego, Go!” have taken their expeditions into new territory at the Children’s Museum of Manhattan, whose exhibition has separate Dora and Diego environments, including Diego’s Animal Rescue Center and Dora’s Fiesta. Intended for ages 2 to 6, the interactive, bilingual displays are designed to teach language, science and music skills, as well as facts about Latin America. From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tisch Building, 212 West 83rd Street, (212) 721-1223, cmom.org; free with museum admission: \$10; \$7 for 65+; free for under 1 and members.20090730

‘AMUSEMENT PARK SCIENCE’ (Friday through Sunday, and Tuesday through Thursday) Most children probably don’t contemplate Newton’s laws of motion while riding a roller coaster — experience them, yes, but not reflect on them. While this new exhibition at the Children’s Museum of Manhattan captures some of the fun of carnival rides, it also highlights the physics that make them possible. The show offers 12 activity stations, including the Amazing Momentum Machine (exploring conservation of angular momentum), the Rotor (an illustration of centripetal force) and opportunities to create roller coasters, in miniature and on the Web. (Through Sept. 10.) From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tisch Building, 212 West 83rd Street, (212) 721-1223, cmom.org; free with museum admission: \$10; \$7 for 65+; free for under 1 and members.20090730

‘ARCHAEOLOGY ZONE: DISCOVERING TREASURES FROM PLAYGROUNDS TO PALACES’ (Friday, Sunday and Monday) Children will step into the shoes of an explorer like Indiana Jones in this permanent exhibition at the Jewish Museum, but the adventures will be purely scholarly. Still, there is plenty of excitement in analyzing artifacts like a jar handle, a clay jug and a bangle and figuring out the purpose behind ancient pieces like a Greek helmet and a bull-shaped vessel. This interactive show also includes a recreated room from the Ottoman period (about 1900), where young archaeologists can dress in costume.

From 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m., 1109 Fifth Avenue, at 92nd Street. , (212) 423-3200, thejewishmuseum.org; free with admission: \$12; \$10 for 65+; \$7.50 for students; free for under 12 and members.20090730

BUG WORKSHOPS (Saturday and Sunday) Did you know that New York has an official state insect? It's even one almost universally acknowledged as cute: the ladybug. The Staten Island Children's Museum, which is offering bug-based programs on weekends in August, will celebrate this colorful creature with readings of the picture book "The Grouchy Ladybug" by Eric Carle, followed by workshops to make a ladybug windsock. At 1, 2 and 3 p.m., Staten Island Children's Museum, 1000 Richmond Terrace, Livingston , (718) 273-2060, statenislandkids.org; free with admission: \$5; free for members and under 1.20090730

'THE BULLY' (Saturday and Sunday) Vital Children's Theater has revived this ever-topical musical, by John Gregor and David L. Williams, which refreshingly avoids the trap of bullying its own audiences with heavy moralizing. Instead the many pitfalls of the typical middle-school relationship of victimizer and victim are revealed through wit, humor and a killer of a sly twist. Saturday at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.; Sunday at 11 a.m., Bleecker Street Theater, 45 Bleecker Street, at Lafayette Street, East Village , (212) 579-0528, vitaltheatre.org; \$25.20090730

'CHARLIE AND KIWI'S EVOLUTIONARY ADVENTURE' (Friday through Thursday) Charlie is a schoolboy, and in this new exhibition at the New York Hall of Science he's following the theories of a famous Charles: Darwin. While researching a report on kiwis, flightless birds found in New Zealand, Charlie goes back to the prehistoric period and learns about the link between dinosaurs and birds. The show includes computer interactives, animation, models and live parakeets (for an exercise in species identification). (Through Aug. 30.) Friday, and Monday through Thursday, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; 47-01 111th Street, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, Queens , (718) 699-0005, nyscience.org; free with admission: \$11; \$8 for ages 62+ and 2 through 17; free for under 2 and members.20090730

CONEY ISLAND BOOM A RING (Friday through Sunday, and Wednesday and Thursday) This Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey production is bringing a taste of the Big Top to the boardwalk — and it's a different show from the one that played at Madison Square Garden. The attractions include white tigers and dachshunds (and a preshow Animal Open House) and, on the Homo sapiens side, acrobats, archers, motorcycle daredevils and other performers. (Through Sept. 7.) Friday, Wednesday and Thursday shows at 2 and 7 p.m.; Saturday at 2:30 and 6:30 p.m.; Sunday at 1 and 5 p.m.; Coney Island boardwalk, 21st Street and Surf Avenue, Brooklyn , (800) 745-3000, ringling.com/coneyisland; \$10 to \$65.20090730

‘DANCE IN THE PARK: A FAMILY MOVEMENT WORKSHOP WITH MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY’ (Saturday and Sunday) The innovative choreographer Merce Cunningham died on Sunday, but the members of his company continue to practice and perpetuate his ideas. At this event, presented by the Joyce Theater and the River to River Festival, they will pass them on to another generation, as they invite children 6 and older to Rockefeller Park to learn Cunningham techniques and to create dances based on their perceptions of time and their surroundings. Since Mr. Cunningham embraced chance as a factor in his choreography, some movements will be determined by rolling dice. At 4 p.m. (the company will also perform in the park at 6 p.m. on both days and at 2 p.m. on Sunday), River Terrace and Warren Streets, Lower Manhattan , rivertorivernyc.com; free; all children must be accompanied by an adult. Reservations are requested via e-mail to mcdcfamilyday@joyce.org.20090730

‘FOCUS’ (Friday, and Monday through Thursday) See the world of New York through a young artist’s lens. This exhibition, organized by Stephanie Pereira, features almost 40 photographs, as well as documentary videos and animations, by students from elementary through high school. Working with the nonprofit Magic Box Productions, which brings arts programs to schools, the young creators have dealt with both portraiture and the urban landscape. (Through Dec. 31.) From 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; group tours available. The Gallery at 180 Maiden Lane, between Front and South Streets, Lower Manhattan , (914) 630-0256, magicboxproductions.org; free.20090730

‘THE GROWING ROCK’ (Wednesday) A growing rock? What’s definitely growing in this American Indian tale are some baby birds that haven’t yet learned to fly. In this musical puppet production from the Shadow Box Theater, which is concluding its Wednesday Summer Theater series for children 3 to 8, Mamma Bluefeather, the birds’ mother, must match wits with a jealous crow. Young audience members help. At 11 a.m. and 1 p.m., South Oxford Space, 138 South Oxford Street, near Hanson Place, Fort Greene, Brooklyn , (212) 724-0677, shadowboxtheatre.org; \$12.50 in advance; \$15 at the door; discounts for groups.20090730

‘HOUSE ABOUT IT!’ (Friday through Sunday, and Tuesday through Thursday) This exhibition gives new meaning to playing house. Created by the Staten Island Children’s Museum, the show, whose centerpiece is a child-size house under construction, introduces young visitors to all aspects of the building trades. Activity stations include an architect’s office, a space to examine foundation materials and a workbench to practice sawing and drilling. The house offers opportunities for tiling and shingling, and a dollhouse lets young decorators ponder fabrics and furnishings. Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; until 8 p.m. on

Wednesdays; 1000 Richmond Terrace, Livingston , (718) 273-2060, statenislandkids.org; free with admission: \$5; free for members and children under 1; free for grandparents on Wednesdays.20090730

KIDFLICKS: ‘SHREK’ (Sunday) That grumpy green ogre with a good heart is back on the big screen again, thanks to this Sunday series at the Brooklyn Lyceum. In the first of the movies based on William Steig’s storybook, Shrek sets out to reclaim his swamp but ends up with a much greater prize. Love — and a lot of foul smells — is in the air. At 3 p.m., the Brooklyn Lyceum, 227 Fourth Avenue, at President Street, Park Slope , (718) 857-4816, brooklynlyceum.com; \$5 a person or \$10 a family. 20090730

‘LIFE ON A DESERT ISLAND’ (Saturday and Sunday) It may be hard to conceive of New York as a desert island, but Samuel Kirk and Jason Vance are trying to do so this summer. These actors rotate the role of Robinson Crusoe in this hourlong one-man play (apparently Friday doesn’t show up this time), adapted by Ugljesa Sajtinac from Daniel Defoe’s classic. Children in the audience help Crusoe develop his survival skills. Saturday at 4:30 p.m. in Central Park, at Central Park West and 68th Street, next to Mineral Spring Cafe. Sunday at 4:30 p.m., Prospect Park, Prospect Park West, near Fifth Street, next to Litchfield Villa, Brooklyn , (646) 964-7007, theatreplayground.com; free.20090730

‘THE LITTLE HOUSE OF COOKIES’ (Saturday) Mending fences — the metaphorical kind — often goes more easily when you invite people to share something delicious. That’s the cheery premise of this musical revival from Tada! Youth Theater, with a script by Janine Nina Trevens and music and lyrics by Joel Gelpe. The plot concerns Alice, a lonely and scorned fifth grader, who comes up with a plan to sweeten the neighborhood (and her own fortunes). At 2 and 4 p.m., Tada! Theater, 15 West 28th Street, second floor, Manhattan , (212) 252-1619, tadatheater.com; \$20; \$8 for ages 15 and under; premium tickets (reserved seating); \$25 and \$15. 20090730

‘LIVE FROM TIMES SQUARE’ (Sunday) It’s a brave parent who would take children to the typical stand-up comedy show in New York. This one, however, promises to be family friendly, with games, sketches, celebrity impersonations and lots of participation by theatergoers. The comics know their audience: included are parodies of “Hannah Montana,” Harry Potter, the Jonas Brothers and “High School Musical.” At 2 p.m., Sage Theater, 711 Seventh Avenue, at 48th Street, Manhattan , (800) 838-3006, brownpapertickets.com; \$18; \$12 for 16 and under.20090730

MAD. SQ. KIDS 2009 (Tuesday and Thursday) The kids attending won’t have to worry about being mad or square: the entertainment is fun and hip in this series of 45-minute concerts in Madison Square Park. Next week’s lineup: On Tuesday the Deedle Deedle Dees, who bill themselves as an “educational rock band,” with songs based on science and history;

and on Thursday a rock and bluegrass group that could win a prize for the most attention-grabbing name: Dog on Fleas. (Through Aug. 13.) At 10:30 a.m., the Oval Lawn, 23rd Street between Madison and Fifth Avenues , madisonsquarepark.org; free.20090730

‘MAGIC AND ZONE: THE COMEDY MAGIC OF RICH MAROTTA AND TWILA ZONE’

(Saturday) Some magic shows have all the deadly seriousness of Harry Potter navigating a really bad day at Hogwarts. But apparently not this one. Rich Marotta, a stand-up comedian, and his wife, Tamara Marotta, aka the pink-haired and often bumbling Twila Zone, profess to combine laughter with illusions, creating a performance that offers magic and sends it up at the same time. (Through September.) At 5 p.m., Snapple Theater Center, 210 West 50th Street, Manhattan , (212) 921-7862, magicandzone.com; \$45; a family rate of \$100 for four tickets is available by using the code Magicfam.20090730

YUTO MIYAZAWA (Sunday) This Japanese musician is a guitar virtuoso who has played with Les Paul and G. E. Smith, and at Madison Square Garden and B. B. King’s Jazz Club and Grill. He also happens to be only 9. In town from his native Tokyo, he will share his talents with other young people at this family matinee. Doors open at 1 p.m.; show at 2 p.m.; the Highline Ballroom, 431 West 16th Street, Chelsea , (866) 468-7619, highlineballroom.com; \$10 in advance; \$12 at the door.20090730

NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN (Friday through Sunday, and Tuesday through Thursday) A pizza garden? What child could resist that? This garden, actually a place for growing wheat, tomatoes, oregano and other pizza ingredients, is part of “Vegetables and Kids,” a program in the Ruth Rea Howell Family Garden at the Botanical Garden. All summer children can plant, tend and harvest in various plots, and this month they can also go on an herbal scavenger hunt, pot up an herb and make an herbal snack in “Herbal Delights, Naturally.” The Everett Children’s Adventure Garden has activities too: “Flower Power,” in which small visitors plant beans, make pollinator puppets and learn how flowers become fruit, and “Farm to Table,” a preschoolers’ play station. (Through Sept. 13.) Fridays, and Tuesdays through Thursdays, 1:30 to 6 p.m.; Saturdays and Sundays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; New York Botanical Garden, Bronx River Parkway (Exit 7W), at Fordham Road, Bedford Park, the Bronx , (718) 817-8700, nybg.org; an all-garden pass is \$20; \$18 for students and 62+; \$8 for children 2 to 12; free for members and under 2; parking, \$12.20090730

‘PETER PAN AND ADVENTURES IN NEVERLAND’ (Friday through Sunday, and Tuesday through Thursday) New York might seem like a Neverland to many, and it is indeed the setting of Zakiiyah Alexander’s new, Americanized adaptation of J. M. Barrie’s classic. Presented by the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theater as a puppet musical (Daryl Kojak composed the score), it also features a Tiger Lily who’s a native of India. (Through August.) Friday, and Monday through Thursday, 10:30 a.m. and noon (with an additional 2:30 p.m.

show on Wednesday); Saturday and Sunday at 1 p.m.; 79th Street and the West Drive, Central Park , (212) 988-9093, cityparksfoundation.org; \$8; \$5 for 18 and under. Reservations required.20090730

‘PINKALICIOUS, THE MUSICAL’ (Saturday and Sunday) It’s time to think pink again. This show for ages 4 to 12, from Vital Children’s Theater, is in yet another revival, so if you missed it earlier, you can catch it now at the Bleecker Street Theater. Elizabeth and Victoria Kann have adapted their children’s book, in which the pink-obsessed title character finds out that sometimes being in the pink can be too much of a good thing. (John Gregor wrote the score and some of the lyrics.) (Through Aug. 30.) At 1 p.m., 45 Bleecker Street, at Lafayette Street, East Village , (212) 239-6200, vitaltheatre.org; \$29.50.20090730

‘PRESERVATION DETECTIVES’ FAMILY TOURS (Sunday and Wednesday) The Eldridge Street Synagogue, the landmark 1887 building where many Jewish immigrants worshiped, has expanded its “Preservation Detectives” tours to two days a week. Every Sunday and Wednesday children 5 to 10 can view artifacts, investigate neighborhood lore and play roles of the past. This month the focus is “Hunt for History,” when young gumshoes will seek specific objects and settings in the synagogue. At 1 p.m., 12 Eldridge Street, between Canal and Division Streets, Lower East Side , (212) 219-0302, eldridgestreet.org; \$15 a family.20090730

‘RUN! JUMP! FLY! ADVENTURES IN ACTION’ (Friday through Sunday, and Tuesday through Thursday) Imagine being able to snowboard and surf in the same place — indoors, no less. That spot is the Brooklyn Children’s Museum, whose latest exhibition, “Run! Jump! Fly! Adventures in Action,” is devoted to making young visitors feel like action heroes, all the while helping them stay physically fit. The exhibition’s stations include the Kung Fu Forest, for martial arts enthusiasts; the Climbing Canyon, with climbing walls; and the Flycycle Sky Gallery, for cycling challenges. Special museum events this weekend include the Target Free Friday Family Jams series, with short films and a concert with the Jamaican musician Father Goose, starting at 5 p.m., and on Saturday and Sunday, for ages 6 and older, “The Art Around Us,” a workshop on outdoor art that includes a collective mural. General hours: Friday, 11 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.; Saturdays and Sundays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., 145 Brooklyn Avenue, at St. Marks Avenue, Crown Heights , (718) 735-4400, brooklynkids.org; free with admission: \$7.50; free for under 1; free to all on Fridays from 5 to 7:30 p.m.20090730

‘STONE SOUP’ (Saturday and Sunday) In this old folk tale a lot of cooks don’t spoil the broth, they enrich it. Literally Alive Children’s Theater has set its version of the fable during the American Revolution, when a pair of hungry but wily soldiers persuade villagers to add ingredients to their odd but delectable recipe. The show, by Michael Sgouros and Brenda Bell, is preceded by an hourlong arts workshop. In the spirit of “Stone Soup,” families are

also asked to bring canned goods to be donated to City Harvest. (Through Aug. 16.)
Workshop at 10 a.m.; show at 11 a.m.; Players Theater, 115 Macdougall Street, near Bleecker
Street, Greenwich Village , (212) 352-3101, literallyalive.com; \$40 for first three rows; \$35 for
second three rows; \$25 for all other seats. (All tickets include the workshop.)20090730

STORIES AT THE STATUE OF HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN LAUREL GRAEBER 19424
STORIES AT THE STATUE OF HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN (Saturday) Not
everything that blooms perennially in Central Park is a flower or a tree. Storytelling also
returns there each summer, as the city's Parks and Recreation Department and the Hans
Christian Andersen Storytelling Center bring narrative performers to Andersen's statue
every Saturday. The series, for ages 6 and older, continues this week with a tale by Andersen
himself: "The Pearl," told by Laura Simms. (Through Sept. 26.) From 11 a.m. to noon, rain or
shine, inside the park at 72nd Street and Fifth Avenue , dianewolkstein.com; free. LAUREL
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