

Spare Times: For Children

By Laurel Graeber

Oct. 29, 2009

‘NO DOGS ALLOWED!’

Many recreational spots in America are family-friendly. But quite a few aren't friendly to certain family members: the toothy, hairy, supersalivating kind that happen to have twice as many legs as everyone else.

That's the crisis in "No Dogs Allowed!," a cheerful road comedy from Atlantic for Kids, the children's wing of the Atlantic Theater Company. Based on the picture book by Sonia Manzano better known as Maria on "Sesame Street" this 50-minute musical, directed by Josh Lewis, has many of the hallmarks of that television series: wry humor, rollicking songs, a sprinkling of Spanish and a multicultural neighborhood's warm embrace (in this case part of the Bronx). What it doesn't have is anything resembling a Muppet. The dog here is played by a guy (David Morris, above with Arielle Siegel), and therein lies much of the show's humor.

Mr. Morris is El Exigente ("the demanding one"), beloved pet of Iris (Ms. Siegel), the younger daughter in an eccentric, fun-loving Puerto Rican family. Mami (Nicole Spiezio) and Papi (Ethan Gómez) have planned an expedition to Enchanted State Park with the local deli owner, Don Joe (Josh Lewis); the newlywed lovebirds Aunt Carmen and Uncle Juan (Jessica Gurulé and Mike Smith Rivera); and of course the dreamy Iris and her pragmatic sister, Shorty (Chloé Wepper). Shorty is a Latina Cassandra, offering dire predictions no one listens to.

But Shorty's uneasy feelings are justified. Iris smuggles El Exigente into the car, even though his last picnic outing resulted in terrible, malodorous consequences to the back seat. Ms. Manzano has adapted her own work, with a sprightly, sometimes Latin-flavored score by Stephen Lawrence and lyrics by Billy Aronson. They have concocted a completely unbelievable but very funny plot in which the car breaks down, the family gets lost, and El Exigente, portrayed with panting eagerness, soulful eyes and fleet, flamenco-esque paws by Mr. Morris, consumes a dozen sandwiches and inserts himself into Carmen and Juan's romantic dancing without ever being discovered.

The jig or rather the tango is up when Iris confronts the inevitable “No Dogs Allowed” sign at the park. But with audience help (the ideal age range is 4 to 10) and creative division of labor, everyone happily learns that sometimes it’s possible to have your picnic and your dog too. (Saturday and Sunday at 10:30 a.m., Linda Gross Theater, 336 West 20th Street, Chelsea, 212-279-4200, atlantictheater.org; \$20; \$10 for children and Atlantic members.)

LAUREL GRAEBER

FOR CHILDREN

‘BABA YAGA AND THE PUMPKIN FAIRY’ (Friday through Sunday) There’s nothing like a witch’s spell to ruin a good harvest. In this musical by ONETIME Productions, for ages 3 to 10, Clara, helper to the witch Baba Yaga, opens a blue jar, with disastrous consequences. But with the help of other characters, the witch learns her lesson. Friday at 4 p.m.; Saturday at noon and 2 and 4 p.m.; Sunday at noon and 2 p.m.; Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Avenue, at 25th Street, (646) 312-4085, baruch.cuny.edu/bpac; \$25.

‘BAMBOO!: BAM UNDER THE SEA’ (Saturday) The Brooklyn Academy of Music is trading haunted houses for shipwrecks in its 14th annual Halloween celebration. All the festivities will have a nautical theme, including arts and crafts, storytelling, carnival games and an oceanic moon bounce. The fun ends with a costume contest. From 4 to 7 p.m., in front of the Peter Jay Sharp Building, 30 Lafayette Avenue, at Ashland Place, Fort Greene, (718) 636-4100, bam.org; free.

BOO AT THE ZOOS (Friday through Sunday) From the woods of the Bronx Zoo to the waters of the New York Aquarium in Coney Island, every Wildlife Conservation Society park in New York City is offering a Halloween celebration. The Bronx Zoo and the aquarium are holding interactive attractions: Haunted Safari Adventure in the Bronx takes children through a bat cave, the belly of a snake and more in search of a lost species; Haunted Sea-Fari Perils of the Deep at the aquarium illustrates the oceanic food chain. Other highlights include a bat discussion and a search for “ghosts” of extinct animals at the Central Park Zoo; spooky shows with live snakes and lizards, presented by Nettie the Wildlife Witch at the Prospect Park Zoo in Brooklyn; and a Haunted Habitat and pumpkin picking at the Queens Zoo. Saturday and Sunday, except the Central Park Zoo, which is Friday and Saturday. Schedules: wcs.org; free with zoo admission; children in costume will be admitted free at the Queens and Bronx Zoos.



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DIA DE LOS MUERTOS (DAY OF THE DEAD) CELEBRATIONS (Friday through Monday) The name may sound scary, but Day of the Dead is a far cry from Halloween night: this cheerful Mexican holiday welcomes the returning souls of loved ones. From Friday through Monday *Mano a Mano: Mexican Culture Without Borders* will hold festivities at St. Mark's Church, with altar building, dancing and workshops in creating sugar skulls, paper art, poetry and holiday bread. On Saturday from 11 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. El Museo del Barrio will celebrate. Daytime highlights for children will include puppet performances, a mask-making workshop, a mariachi concert and a costumed procession through Central Park. St. Mark's Church, 131 East 10th Street, East Village. Schedule and details: (212) 587-3070, manoamano.us. El Museo del Barrio, 1230 Fifth Avenue, at 104th Street, East Harlem. Schedule and details: (212) 831-7272, elmuseo.org. Free.

'DISNEY'S A CHRISTMAS CAROL' TRAIN TOUR (Friday through Sunday) Christmas at Halloween? Well, it does involve ghosts. This train promoting Disney's forthcoming 3-D film of the Dickens classic pulls into Grand Central Terminal for the weekend, with exhibits on the moviemaking technology and artifacts from the Charles Dickens Museum in London. A portable theater will also screen a film excerpt. Friday, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Vanderbilt Hall, Grand Central Terminal, disney.com/christmascarol; free.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY GHOST TOURS (Saturday) The Merchant's House Museum is proud of its reputation as "Manhattan's most haunted house." This 1832 Federal brick building is said to be filled with spirits, particularly that of Gertrude Tredwell, a daughter of the importer Seabury Tredwell. The 30-minute tours, recommended for ages 7 to 12, are spooky enough to

please the most skeptical, and are followed by 19th-century refreshments and activities. From noon to 5 p.m. (last tour starts at 4), 29 East Fourth Street, East Village, (212) 777-1089, merchantshouse.org; \$10; reservations suggested.

HALLOWEEN AT THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY (Friday and Saturday) Young revelers can investigate some monsters that really existed. At Imax After Hours: “Dinosaurs Alive” on Friday at 5:30 p.m., families will see this new Imax documentary about fossil excavations at Ghost Ranch in northern New Mexico; children in costume will receive Halloween treats on their way out. There’s more trick-or-treating on Saturday from 2 to 5 p.m., at the annual “Spooktacular,” which will also include arts and crafts, pumpkin carving and live music. 79th Street and Central Park West, (212) 769-5200, amnh.org. Friday: \$24; \$14 for children (includes museum and Rose Center admission). Saturday: \$10; \$9 for members; Monster Meal packages, \$18 and \$17, include admission.

‘THE LEGEND OF ICHABOD CRANE’ (Saturday) One of Washington Irving’s most memorable characters comes to life in the form of Dan Kitrosser, an actor and storyteller who has freely adapted this classic for ages 5 and older. Accompanied by Ilan Isakov on piano — and by young audience members — Mr. Kitrosser will try to outrun the Headless Horseman. At 11 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., Brooklyn Lyceum, 227 Fourth Avenue, at President Street, Park Slope, (718) 857-4816, brooklynlyceum.com; \$10, or four tickets for \$30.

MONSTER MASH FEST (Friday and Saturday) It’s a museum smash — so much so that this year it’s on two nights. The Brooklyn Children’s Museum offers a D.J. dance, a costume parade, “Creepy Crawly Creatures” (this museum has its own live-animal collection) and a Mad Scientist’s Laboratory, as well as a “Wee Little Monsters” program for preschoolers. From 5 to 8 p.m., 145 Brooklyn Avenue, at St. Mark’s Avenue, Crown Heights, (718) 735-4400, brooklynkids.org; \$10; \$5 for members.

NOT TOO SCARY HALLOWEEN PARTY (Saturday) Expect lots of dancing à la Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” video on the East Meadow outside the Staten Island Children’s Museum. Its annual celebration will also include games, crafts and pumpkin carving. From noon to 4 p.m., 1000 Richmond Terrace, Livingston, (718) 273-2060, stateniskids.org; free.

PUMPKIN PARTY WITH PETE SEEGER & FRIENDS (Saturday) There’s nothing scary about Pete Seeger, except perhaps his warnings about the environment. This Halloween benefit will help the conservation cause, namely New York City Friends of Clearwater, part of Mr. Seeger’s Hudson River initiative. Pete Seeger & Friends will play, along with many other musicians; pumpkins and barbecued food will be plentiful; and the first 100 children

will receive Hugg-A-Planet toys (soft globes). From noon to 5 p.m., the lightship Frying Pan and Pier 66, 26th Street and the Hudson River, Chelsea, (718) 522-1202, goodnewsbroadcast.com; free.

SUPER DUPER JUST KIDDING EXTRAVAGANZA (Sunday) This variety show could be considered a parade of all-time greats: the entertainers who have made the Just Kidding series, part of the children's programming at Symphony Space, so memorable over the years, including Dan Zanes, Sonia Manzano (Maria on "Sesame Street") and the science-fiction balladeer Gustafer Yellowgold. All proceeds will benefit Symphony Space's family programs. At 4 p.m., 2537 Broadway, at 95th Street, (212) 864-5400, symphonyspace.org; \$35; \$15 for children; \$45 and \$25 for premium tickets (front and center rows).

'THE WITCH'S CHILD' LAUREL GRAEBER 44545 'THE WITCH'S CHILD' (Saturday) WNYC's new broadcast studio is inviting children to celebrate an old-fashioned Halloween with an old-fashioned audio play. Using music, projections and sound effects, the radio station will present an adaptation of Arthur Yorinks's picture book "The Witch's Child." Fortunetelling and face painting will be offered too. At 11 a.m., Jerome L. Greene Performance Space, 44 Charlton Street, at Varick Street, South Village, wnyc.org/thegreenespace; \$10; \$5 for children. LAUREL GRAEBER