

## REVIEW

# Kids shine in marvelous Western 'Lear'

By Eboni Booth

*Free Press Staff Writer*

Children's theater can be difficult. In addition to the usual worries that come with any theatrical production, there are concerns that someone will forget a cue and an entire scene will be omitted; someone will be too scared to venture on stage; someone will cry because they are unhappy with their costume; or, nobody will project, and the audience won't be able to hear a word of dialogue.

As difficult as theater for children might be, it also can be extremely rewarding, and after watching the Very Merry Theater's final show of the summer, "Shakespeare's King Lear — The Western," it is easy to understand why people love to work with children in a theatrical environment.

"Shakespeare's King Lear — The Western" had its first show Monday on the Middlebury green. The show takes the audience to The Very Prairie Ranch where characters such as Rancher Lear, General U.S., and Bob Two-

Arms roam free. Director Don Wright has updated and shortened the Shakespearean tale, and with the help of the Chrome Cowboys' Brett Hughes, it has been made into a musical production complete with choreography.

The Very Merry Theater is a nonprofit organization that Wright has been running for three years. He adapts a story, and then gets started with an intensive two-week program. During the first week, the cast and crew prepare the entire show: lines and songs are learned, sets are constructed and costumes are chosen. The second week is "devoted to performing and having fun," Wright said.

"Basically, the Very Merry Theater is about adapting the classics for a family audience," Wright said. This year's season included renditions of "Cyrano de Bergerac" and "Great Expectations."

"The classics provide such a broad landscape that any child can find something — could be a queen, a king or a cowboy," Wright said.

The interesting thing about the Very Merry Theater is that each performance takes

place in a different town. The troupe, composed of actors between the ages of 6 and 13, performs on a traveling stage that has been constructed on a flat-bed truck. In addition to Middlebury, they will visit Bristol, Burlington, Montpelier and Charlotte.

Despite the challenges that come with performing outdoors — the traffic, sirens and noisy downshifting of trucks — Wright's troupe was extremely energetic and animated, and they stayed in character through the entire performance. They seemed to be having such a good time as they argued over land, challenged each other to a duel, and sang songs about the good ol' West.

"I love working with kids," Wright said Monday following the performance. "I also love great literature. I love watching the kids find and create characters in the context of a great story."

The Very Merry Theater production is a must-see. It is a wonderful way to spend an afternoon, and is a great reminder of the wonderful, energetic talent that exists in children.



### If you go

- **WHAT:** "Shakespeare's King Lear — The Western"
- **PRESENTED BY:** The Very Merry Theater
- **WHEN & WHERE:** Noon Tuesday, Bristol green; noon Wednesday, Battery Park, Burlington; Noon Thursday, Statehouse Lawn, Montpelier; Sunset (7 p.m.) Friday, Staige Barn, Charlotte (Spear Street Extension South past Marbles Store, left on Pringle Road, left on Garen)