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## Everybody Loves Pirates

By Nan Lincoln

Well, the puppets packed them in last Saturday – or perhaps it was the promise of pirates. But in any case, the orchestra section of the Criterion was filled with children’s laughter when the Frogtown Mountain Puppeteers presented their new show, “Everybody Loves Pirates.”

If the show’s title overstates a bit the public’s romance with bloodthirsty buccaneers, it would not be too much of a stretch to say, at least, that everyone there loved *these* pirates – namely No Eye, One Eye and Scully – the captain and crew of a two-masted schooner that plied the Criterion stage like, well, a ship at sea, its Jolly Roger flying from the foremast.

But let’s start at the beginning, which finds us aboard a dinghy with Li’l Chucky and his pal, Lucy, who are fishing for the legendary Walter – the big fish who always gets away.

Despite Li’l Chucky’s habit of hooking himself and falling overboard, the youngsters actually manage to catch Walter – who is indeed a large and impressive fish – and get towed out to sea for their trouble. Things take an even more exciting turn when Walter coughs up a bottle that contains a treasure map. Of course, the kids make plans to find the treasure, which Chucky hopes consists of “gold, diamonds, rubies and pies,” and set out the next morning to do just that. On their way, they encounter a loud-mouthed jet skier, a superhero Lobster Boy with his sidekick, Crabby, and a Zen-like giant sea monkey who actually does enjoy playing volleyball and barbecuing, just like the comic book ads claim. Oh, and there’s also a brief encounter with a flock of imaginary sheep.

Meanwhile, aboard the pirate ship, Captain No Eye, who not only sports two eye patches, but two hooks, is berating his dim-bulbed crew for having lost a certain treasure map.

As always must happen in tales of

pirates, treasure and innocent children, the good guys and the bad guys cross paths, and much confusion, consternation and plank-walking ensues. With the help of Lobster Boy’s toe pinching skills the good guys are rescued in the nick of time and all ends well.

Needless to say, the real fun is in the telling of this tale, and it’s hard to beat a literal handful of colorful, wisecracking, hyperkinetic puppets as the tellers of such tales. What is often hard to grasp when watching all this activity is that only three people and six hands belonging to siblings Eric, Brian and Robin Torbeck are behind not only the large cast of characters, but the moving scenery, multiple props and a couple of sailing vessels, to boot.

Robin Torbeck, who is sometimes overshadowed by her bombastic brothers in these productions, really shines here as the acerbic Lucy, who also fills in the story with her wry and funny narration, and the dim-witted Scully, whose big goal in life is to lose an eye or a limb

like his fellow pirates. I think Eric Torbeck took on the role of Li'l Chucky, and his brother Brian, Capt. One Eye. But these guys are so versatile, it could have been vice versa or one doing both. In any case, it is truly an ensemble performance filled with visual moments that are so captivating it makes one forget these characters aren't self-motivated and self-propelled. Like when old No Eye falls down the treasure hole and the rest gather round it, staring down with such concentration you catch yourself believing it really is a hole they're looking at. Or the jet skier bobbing up and down on the waves until it makes you kind of queasy; and, oh, when the pirate ship tacks across the stage towards the deserted treasure island. Just neat.

Young audiences, their parents and all lovers of puppets and pirates will have two more chances to catch "Everybody Loves Pirates" at the Criterion. It will be performed again this Saturday, Aug. 31, at 4 p.m. However, those who missed this first show

also missed the chance to see a terrific young a cappella group from Ithica, N.Y. The Sons of Pitches kept the audience entertained – and we're talking hordes of 4-, 5- and 6-year-olds here – for a good half hour as the seats filled. Excellent harmonies and showmanship, and the five guys were not bad to look at, either. We also hear from reliable sources they may come back for their own concert next summer. If so, don't miss it.

Tickets for "Everybody Loves Pirates" are \$4 at the door, and part of the proceeds benefit Willowind Therapeutic Riding Center.