





# Jack and the Soy Beanstalk

New York International Fringe Festival

reviewed by **Matt Roberson**

Aug 16, 2009

As the parent of a toddler, I find myself attending a sizable amount of entertainment billed as being for "children." And for much of it, I go in with a lump of dread in my heart. Luckily, however, films like *Shrek*, picking up where the Muppets left off, have proven that work made for younger audiences can also be equally entertaining, and enriching, for the parents as well. *Jack and the Soy Beanstalk*, playing at Dixon Place as part of the 2009 FringeNYC Festival, is exactly this kind of show.

As expected, the story follows Jack, who, helping out his ever-in-debt family at the request of his mother, goes in search of someone willing to take their trusty wind-powered truck in exchange for some much needed liquidity (the eco-friendly automobile being just one of this play's very creative modern touches). As he makes his way through the countryside, Jack is confronted with one of the play's central messages: storybook-like farms still exist, but only in the encroaching shadow of dark, dreary, corporate-based crop factories. After releasing the truck for the proverbial "magic beans," Jack arrives home defeated, and, after telling his mother about the exchange, grounded as well. When the beans sprout into a stalk, however, in the most hilarious of places, Jack's chance for redemption arrives, leaving us with nothing less than a storybook ending. As performed by this incredibly talented and competent troupe, *Jack and the Soy Beanstalk* does not disappoint on any level. The script is fast-paced and energetic, yet never sacrifices its sharp

wit and clarity of purpose. Additionally, the production's contemporary call for a simpler, more natural culture, is woven seamlessly into the structure and sentiment of the original tale.

Carlos Avilas, as Jack, convincingly exudes many of the qualities of a young kid, without ever having to scream at us, "Remember – I'm twelve!" He also has a terrific voice, providing a worthy medium for Jerrod Bogard's witty, sophisticated (yet never didactic) lyrics and Sky Seals's music. Matching his performance is, well, the rest of the cast. Seals, playing both the narrator and a farmer, gives the audience another rich voice, as well as a terrific energy as he moves the story along. Avilas and Seals are supported by a very funny, talented quartet of actors, who in wearing an array of hats, do so in a way that highlights their individual abilities without ever drowning out the greater effort. And if you're expecting a Fringe show that lacks an equally engaging design, think again. This production of Jack is complimented perfectly by Bogard's puppets, Jen McCabe's paintings, and Sabrina Kahn's costumes, all of which add a magical, other-worldly backdrop to the play's already engaging storyline.

While this newest incarnation of Jack has a lot to teach kids about perseverance, imagination, and the pleasure that comes from providing for one's self, it also has a lot to say to the parents filling every other seat (after all, it isn't a bunch of toddlers who are to blame for our current financial mess). Of course if nothing else, *Jack and the Soy Beanstalk* provides us weary, nearly defeated parents at least one more arrow of hope in the everlasting battle against dopey purple dinosaurs and Barbie.

Producer: Wide Eyed Productions

Author: Book & Lyrics by Jerrod Bogard, Music by Sky Seals & Jerrod Bogard

### **Buy tickets for this show:**

**Sat August 15 12:00 pm**

**Sun August 16 4:15 pm**

**Tue August 18 5:30 pm**

**Wed August 19 7:15 pm**

**Fri August 21 7:30 pm**

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