



A guide to the sensory-friendly performance of **Stellaluna**

Estimated Running time: 40 minutes

About the Show

Stellaluna is a live theatrical production performed for an audience. The audience includes boys and girls, moms and dads, and other grown-ups, like grandparents, teachers, family, and friends. All of them have come for the same reason—to enjoy the show!

An adaptation for the stage of the beloved 1993 children’s book by Janell Cannon, *Stellaluna* is a story told using puppets. The puppets are made to move and vocalize by specially trained actors called puppeteers. The five puppeteers for this show each perform their primary puppets, but sometimes other puppets, too. They will introduce themselves before the play starts to show you how the puppets work. For this puppet play, the puppeteers will be onstage and visible the entire time.



The Story

Stellaluna is the gentle story of a little fruit bat who finds a temporary family when she falls into a bird nest after having been separated from her mother. Too little to know how she’s different, Stellaluna learns from her bird foster family to do things the “bird way.” She learns to eat bugs, sleep upright, and stay awake during daylight hours. Only when she finds her mother again does she understand why living like a bird was not easy for her. Then she’s able to turn the tables on her three bird “siblings” and teach them about what comes naturally for fruit bats, like hanging upside down, flying at night, and eating mangos. In the end, they are amazed by how they are so similar and also so different, but vow to always be friends.

The Production

A live theatre performance usually has special lighting, sound effects, music, sets, costumes, and props that help tell the story. Here are a few examples of stagecraft you might want to note in advance. “Stellaluna” uses puppets that are performed live. The puppeteers wear costumes and are seen the entire time they perform the puppets, sometimes talking directly to the audience. There is plenty of music to help define the mood including one up-tempo song and puppet dance, and an audience participation call and response stretch at the end of the show. There are several night scenes where the stage is mostly dark, and some subtle use of black light to show mangos painted to glow. At one point, the trees that make up the set dramatically grow and re-shape themselves to show a change in locale.



Other Things to Note

Although the story is mainly one of making friends, defining family, and finding one’s true nature, there are also some dramatic moments. Stellaluna and her mother become separated as the mother bat, clutching her baby, is chased and attacked by a large predatory owl. When Stellaluna is dropped, she falls into the trees below, leaving her cold, scared and alone. Hanging on until she can’t any longer, she falls again, this time into the birds’ nest. The owl returns later, still chasing the mother bat as she searches for her lost baby. The owl scenes are accompanied by dark, slightly aggressive music. While she’s living with the birds, Stellaluna and the baby birds learn to fly, resulting in comical and occasionally tense moments as they find their wings. The mother bird feeds her babies and Stellaluna worms and bugs, with the little bat gagging and trying to make do. When Stellaluna takes the birds to visit her mother, the birds try to fly at night but are chased by the carnivorous owl. Stellaluna uses her innate night navigating skills to lead the birds to safety, then physically fights off the owl.

The Experience

In most theaters, the audience sits quietly in the dark, sometimes right next to someone, and they usually stay seated. While they may clap or laugh, they usually don’t talk except in whispers. This is nice because it doesn’t interfere with the other audience members or the performers. For this performance, there will be some extra sitting space for wiggle room, and if audience members want to make sounds, get up and walk around, or to go to a quiet place outside the theater, that’s okay. Fidget toys, headphones, and sunglasses are available, for anyone who would like them. The house lights won’t dim completely so it won’t be totally dark in the audience during the show. Although not usually the case, for this performance eating a snack quietly is allowed for people who’ve brought them. If you need anything to make your time in the theater more comfortable, just ask a staff member wearing a Center for Puppetry Arts badge for help.