

'Billy, Goat, Gruff'

SCCT presents state premiere of musical

By Paul Hyde

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Because many of the young actors in "Billy, Goat, Gruff — The Musical" play goats, director Betsy Bisson had the kids do a little research.

"I sent my cast up to a goat farm to see how goats interact and play," Bisson says. "They really enjoyed it."

The cast members get to show off their goat-mimicking abilities Friday when the South Carolina Children's Theatre production of "Billy, Goat, Gruff" opens at the Peace Center's Gunter Theatre for eight performances through June 19.

SCCT is presenting the South Carolina premiere of the musical about three goats named "Billy," "Goat" and "Gruff," who only want to cross a bridge to get to the Pasture of Paradise.

They're thwarted, however, by

a troll (played by local theater veteran Will Ragland) and his henchman, a sarcastic frog.

The three clever goats, however, may yet win the day.

"It's a great story, a fun and funny show," says Bisson.

The musical is based on a Norwegian folk tale that ends with the troll tossed into the river, but Bisson promises a happier ending with a message about facing fears and seeing past prejudice.

Even very young children will like the show, says Bisson, who directed the musical in 2008 at the Flat Rock Playhouse when she was the playhouse's director of youth theater.

"It's adorable for kids," says Bisson, SCCT's artistic/education director. "When we did it for Flat Rock we had 3-year-olds who had no trouble following the story."

The cast features a dozen children and four adults.

The musical was written by two actors associated with Virginia's respected Barter Theatre. Gwen Edwards wrote the book and lyrics and Ben Mackel com-

YOU CAN GO

■ What: "Billy, Goat, Gruff — The Musical," produced by the South Carolina Children's Theatre

■ When: 7 p.m. on Friday-Saturday and June 17-18; 2 p.m. on Saturday and June 12, 18-19

■ Where: Peace Center's Gunter Theatre

■ Tickets: \$17 for children, \$26 for adults

■ Information: 864-467-3000 or www.peacecenter.org

posed the music.

"Ben is one of my former students in Flat Rock," Bisson says. "He went off to college and started writing shows."

The actors are accompanied by a three-person band: guitar, bass and percussion.

When Bisson first saw the show at the Barter Theatre in 2007, she particularly enjoyed the way the musical uses the entire ensemble.

"It allows the chorus to become storytellers as well as goats and even form the bridge itself," Bisson says. "I like imaginative, non-literal shows."

KIDS' stuff



PATRICK COLLARD / Staff

Will Ragland, as the troll, and Adelaide Vergnolle, from left, Shawn Simmons and Kristofer Parker appear in the South Carolina Children's Theatre's "Billy, Goat, Gruff."