

For Children

Dulcie Leimbach

■ Recalling Dr. King with a gospel musical

■ Improvise, says Wynton Marsalis.

'Faith Journey'

Actors' Playhouse
100 Seventh Avenue South (between
Bleeker and Grove Streets)
Greenwich Village
(212) 222-8666

Recommended ages: 9 and up
Thursdays through Sundays
Special performance on Monday
for Martin Luther King Day

Although the sections in history books devoted to the civil rights movement have grown, when children see the story re-enacted on stage they can see the human foibles that often feed political and historical moments. This musical focuses on the civil rights era's early rumblings, when the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. began preaching about nonviolence and Rosa Parks refused to sit in the back of a bus.

"Faith Journey" started last summer in New York City, and ran through Christmas. It is being re-staged for an indefinite run, to accommodate schoolchildren during the week and the general public on weekends.

Children, even those who usually hate musicals, should love the music: the actors sing mostly traditional gospel numbers, inciting waves of enthusiasm among the younger chil-

dren and teen-agers in the audience.

The story, set in Montgomery, Ala., involves a preacher, his long-time companion and the preacher's congregation. An additional character is a lawyer from New York, who helps the cause and falls in love with the preacher (and he with her). There are additional ripples when the parishioners propose boycotts. Inevitably, everyone becomes involved in the incipient civil rights movement whether they planned to or not.

King is referred to frequently, and is represented by an actor impersonating his voice offstage. Like more and more contemporary theatrical productions aimed at families, this one is multimedia: pictures of King and other civil rights movement scenes are projected, obliquely reminding children that they are watching an event that actually happened, back when their parents were children.

The timeless love triangle among the preacher, his friend and the lawyer keeps the story personal (it obviously resonated with several teenage girls at a recent performance, who shouted "amen" when the lawyer gave a women-are-equal speech to the rather sexist preacher). But it's the message of freedom moving through the songs that ultimately

stirs the audience.

The show lasts two hours, with an intermission. Though it is geared to older children, younger children who can sit still for that long may enjoy this glimpse at the early days of the civil rights movement. Tickets are \$28 each, but a parent-child pair pays only one admission. Hours are Thursdays and Fridays at 8 P.M., Saturdays at 3 and 8 P.M., Sundays at 3 and 7 P.M. The special show this Monday is at noon.

'Jazz for Young People'

Alice Tully Hall
Lincoln Center
(212) 721-6500 (Center Charge)
Recommended ages: 5 and up
Tomorrow

Improvisation is what children do naturally, probably even during sleep; who knows what's bouncing around during their REM? When adults try to be themselves, they call it extemporizing. Indeed, musicians, particularly those in jazz, have to work hard at spontaneity. In the second "Jazz for Young People" program this season, Wynton Marsalis, the host, is to ponder with the audience exactly what improvisation is and why it's the essence of jazz (and childhood).

Improvisation "is like a conversation," Mr. Marsalis said. "You say, 'O.K.,' and then I say something and then you say, 'But, you know.'"

All that doesn't sound like jazz, or even very interesting.

"Oh, but it is," Mr. Marsalis said.

In this program, kazoos will be given to the children in the audience to play. That way, Mr. Marsalis said, he can demonstrate the different principles of improvisation: form, rhythmic embellishment, melodic embellishment and harmony.

All that can be done on a kazoo?

"We're going to try," Mr. Marsalis promised. "It's my innovation."

Mr. Marsalis's concerts for children, or master classes as he calls them, can have a trancelike effect; families come to Alice Tully Hall a little tired (it's Saturday, after all) and a little belligerent ("it's Saturday, entertain me"), but everyone leaves with the realization that any ambivalence about jazz or a concert can be converted into passion with the right mix. In this case, Mr. Marsalis is the key: he projects his love affair with jazz in a way that makes the audience forget it's being taught, it's as if he slips everyone under a spell.

His teaching method is a simple and relaxing approach of mild lecture, sardonic humor, musical demonstrations, videos on a giant screen and call-and-response participation (children love to shout and Mr. Marsalis doesn't mind).

The hourlong programs are at 11 A.M. and 1 P.M.; tickets are \$12, \$8 for those under 18. Mr. Marsalis is to be accompanied by Cyrus Chestnut on piano, Ali Jackson on drums and Reuben Rogers on bass. The last children's concert of the season, "What Is a Composer?," is March 25.

My Friday Jan 13-95