



SPICING UP OUR LIVES

Posh Spice (also known as Tessa Sven) signs autographs for young fans Ricky McFarland, 8, Lauren Noel, 9, and Stephanie McFarland, 5, following the performance of Backstreet, Spice and Britney tribute bands Sunday at Markham Theatre.

STAFF PHOTO SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Parents seek party favours

From page 18

your party is not cheap. Parties can run anywhere from \$95 to \$300.

Parents say the ability to co-ordinate everything under one roof, away from your home, is worth the price.

At Reptilia in Vaughan, Wally the water monitor, Betty the Burmese Python and Puff the bearded dragon are the stars of a 45-minute reptile show, popular with kids five to 12.

For up to 12 children, the cost is \$200 on weekends and \$169 weekdays, which includes pizza and cake. And for those who want the slippery creatures to come to them, a travelling road show is available for \$185.

Last month, Smythe opted to bring the entertainment home for Sarah's eighth birthday party, calling on the skills of Vivian Black of StoryBox Productions.

A former costume designer for the Toronto Santa Claus parade, Black became a victim of downsizing several years ago. She decided to strike out on her own, promoting her business as "have costumes, will travel" for kid parties.

Children are encouraged to choose from Black's 20 costume choices and make up a play themselves, or use musical instruments to augment the production. Costumes range from kings, queens or jesters to Peter Pan and Little Bo Peep.

A videotape is made of the party, which parents can keep as a memento of the day. Black's fee is \$150 for one hour—a suitable length of time for the attention span of children.

"They absolutely loved it," said Smythe, who watched with delight as Sarah and 10 friends paraded in costumes up and down the sidewalk.

Shirley Valentine provided great escape on cold winter night

BY ISOBEL THOMPSON
Correspondent

The Markham Little Theatre production of *Shirley Valentine* was at Markham Theatre last week playing to large and enthusiastic houses.

Willy Russell was the playwright and first made his name with *Educating Rita*. Both that film and *Shirley Valentine* feature tough but vulnerable middle-aged Liverpool housewives, one of whom is looking for an education while the other is yearning to be "falling in love with the love of living".

Act I takes place in a Liverpool kitchen where Shirley spends a lot of time talking to the wall and Act II is set on a beach in Greece.

Shirley Valentine is a one-woman show and requires an actor with an enormous amount of energy, humour

and pathos to make it work.

MLT's Kerry Harman had all these attributes and then some. She had the audience in her hands from the opening scene.

Harman was funny, earthy, warm-hearted and appealing and had the advantage of having Russell's great dialogue to work with. She received a standing ovation, which she thoroughly deserved.

The play was directed by Eric Newton and he certainly knew how to move his actor very efficiently and made sure Shirley looked totally at home in her kitchen.

Newton's handling of the scene changes in Act I was a real imaginative bit of theatre. He had the two stage assistants dance to the music as they picked up and re-set props.

Set designer Ron Brownsberger's kitchen set was well executed and allowed Shirley plenty of room to move around. I would have liked to see it more dingy—a place to escape from—and a huge contrast to the sun-drenched beach.

Brownsberger did a great job of the set of the beach, with its grasses, rocks and the big beach umbrella in the foreground.

The show was produced by Michele Brown and stage managed by Peggy Wyatt. Everything, including sound by Eric Newton, make-up and hair-styling by Michele Armand and costumes by Elizabeth Wyatt, added to the production.

Shirley Valentine was a delightfully warm and human show on a cold, cold night.



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