

# The Sorcerer's apprentice

By OyamO  
Music by Carman Moore  
Directed by Linda Hartzell  
Ages 6 and up/Grades 1 and up  
December 1, 2006 – January 27, 2007  
World Premiere Musical

## SYNOPSIS

Young, hungry, and on his own, Charles finds himself in a mystical wood with talking plants and animals—the prickly Jeremy Groundhog, Southern belle Ms. Orange Tree, the grounded Mr. Juniper Bush, and more. What's even more disarming is that he can understand and talk back to them. Catching sight of a house, Charles hides to get a glimpse of the owner, Marguerite, the queen of the forest. He is astounded as she makes everyday objects sail through the air, work in the garden, and seem to come alive. He has never seen a sorcerer before! Catching him lurking there, Marguerite can see potential in the strange young boy and decides to let him stay and help her around the house. Charles hopes to prove himself in order to learn her magical ways; however, things don't go so well. After making a costly blunder, he blames everyone else, refusing to take his share of the responsibility. That mistake costs him the first of three chances with Marguerite.

Big John King, Marguerite's nemesis, enters and questions Charles about the sorcerer, hoping to find her weakness. Charles thinks King is seeking her help, so he brags on her skills. As time passes, the boy bemoans that he hasn't learned any sorcery yet, not understanding that the chores he's given are a proof of Marguerite's trust. While on a delivery, Charles makes yet another damaging mistake. Luckily, Marguerite shows up to save the day. But there goes his second chance. If only Charles would listen to his elder. Back at the sorcerer's house, Charles is supposed to clean the office without disturbing anything. Instead, he opens books, tries spells, and unleashes a fantastical havoc he can't control. That's it—strike three. Marguerite fixes the damage to her office but the damage to her trust is irreparable. Charles, again, blames everyone else for his mistakes, and now it's too much—he's fired and asked to leave. In his desperation, he believes that Big John King, through his own magic, can help him convince Marguerite to take him back. But once John and his sinister, otherworldly minions put a spell on her, Marguerite weakens. Seeing his chance, John challenges her to a duel. Things look bleak for Marguerite, so she sends for Charles, who has been imprisoned by King. Using his wits to escape King's guard, the monster Gordagu, Charles comes to his mentor's aid, vanquishing the evil foe. For his loyalty and bravery, Marguerite, and the rest of the forest creatures, embrace Charles as one of their own. He has finally learned to listen to others and is truly ready to be the sorcerer's apprentice.

## BOOKLIST

Prepared by J.T. Isch and Holly Smith,  
Pierce County Library System

### For Children

*The Book of Wizard Magic: In Which the Apprentice Finds Marvelous Magic Tricks, Mystifying Illusions & Astonishing Tales*

Janice Eaton Kilby

*Charmed Life*

Diana Wynne Jones

*Diary of a Fairy Godmother*

Esme Raji Codell

*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

J.K. Rowling

*Moss Gown*

William H. Hooks

*So You Want to be a Wizard*

Diane Duane

*The Sorcerer's Apprentice*

Mary Jane Begin

*Wizard at Work*

Vivian Vande Velde

*Wizard's Hall*

Jane Yolen

### Spotlight

*Imagine You're a Wizard*

Meg and Lucy Clibbon

So you'd like to be a wizard? This book will tell you everything you need to know, from what wizards have to learn to where they work and what they wear.

### For Adults

#### Spotlight

*The Sorcerer's Companion: A Guide to the Magical World of Harry Potter*

Allan Kronzek

Explores the true history, folklore, and mythology behind the magical practices, creatures and personalities that appear in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books.



# THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

*Hat der alte Hexenmeister  
Sich doch einmal wegbegeben!  
Und nun sollen seine Geister  
Auch nach meinem Willen leben.*

*That old sorcerer has vanished  
And for once has gone away!  
Spirits called by him, now banished,  
My commands shall soon obey.*



*A depiction of Goethe's  
The Sorcerer's Apprentice.*

The words above begin the poem *Der Zauberlehrling* (*The Sorcerer's Apprentice*), written in 1779 by the famous German intellectual Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The poem tells the story of a sorcerer who departs his workshop, leaving his apprentice to fill a cistern with water. The apprentice tires and enchants a broom to do the work for him, but when the water overflows, he is unable to stop the enchanted broom. He splits the broom with an axe, but each of the pieces takes up a pail and begins fetching water faster than ever. Just as all seems lost in a massive flood, the sorcerer returns and breaks the spell.

Goethe based his poem on *Philopsuedes*, written by Lucian of Samosata, a Greek satirist in 150 C.E. While *Philopsuedes* was used to poke fun at tall tales of the supernatural, Goethe chose to focus his story on the dangers of unleashing forces you cannot control. Goethe's poem, in turn, inspired a famous symphonic poem composed in 1897 by Paul Dukas, *L'Apprenti Sorcier*.

This music was also used by Walt Disney in his 1940 film *Fantasia*. That "sorcerer's apprentice" section of the movie was used again in Disney's *Fantasia 2000*. Many who hear this music today, or indeed hear the phrase "sorcerer's apprentice" picture Mickey Mouse in his master's magical hat with the enchanted brooms swirling about and buckets slopping water over the flooded floor.

SCT's play uses the original sorcerer's apprentice story idea as a foundation for the action, but incorporates other story elements as well. For example, Aesop's fable of "The Dog and his Bone" lies behind the demise of Gordagu the killer. Charles' initial argument with the talking plants in Marguerite's enchanted forest is similar to Alice's arguments with the flowers in "Alice in Wonderland." Playwright OyamO has used many sources to craft the story of a boy who, through trials and tribulations, finds his true destiny as a sorcerer's apprentice.

## OYAMO ON WRITING



*"The 'well made play' is fine, but I'm totally happy that every writer of drama does not write always the 'well-made play.' How boring would that be if all dramatic works were exactly alike?"*

In a recent lecture at Harvard, the poet Seamus Heaney made a telling statement about the process that the artist should, or must, follow when creating art. That process eschews timidity; the artist must "let go," he said, and follow the impulse, the instinct, the viscera to wherever it leads. One becomes a vessel or, better, a conduit through which moves the work. Exactly where inspired "work" comes from is mysterious in a way. Can one put passion or inspiration in a test tube, observe it, create statistics on its structural make up? Over the last 35-40 years I've gradually evolved toward that notion of "letting go" with often good results and sometimes with results not so good. I've never followed a particular format, classical or otherwise, but I have observed and employed some of the useful conventions in creating works for the stage. You see, I believe rules in the arts are merely conventions, not laws. Aristotle is useful as an aesthetic missionary with an offering, not as a rigid colonial master who enforces conformity. The "well made play" is fine, but I'm totally happy that every writer of drama does not write always the "well-made play." How boring would that be if all dramatic works were exactly alike? No. Our job as artists is to let the work discover what it should look like stylistically, structurally, etc. according to what we intuitively feel as the work creates itself through us. I know. This all sounds so "arty" which is not what I intend. I think that "letting go" is simply following your passion with the tools of an artist. It is a very difficult thing to do during this era of the "art police" who seek to constrain us, to enforce an "acceptable" format and topicality that will satisfy a commercial hunger.

Over the years I've used fantasy, tragedy, biography, comedy, monologue, musicality, surrealism, expressionism, realism, narration, poetry, media, and anything that feels like it would work. I wasn't always aware of what I did or why. I went only according to feeling. Like Lester Young, the great Jazz musician, who used to declare that he played like he felt at the moment he put the horn to his lips. I've also been a socially and politically conscious artist person who is not afraid to address serious issues that deeply affect us in this American experience. At the Yale Drama School I noticed that the classical writers of the early theatre (from the Greeks up through the poetic realists and anti-realists) wrote about what was happening in their times, being critical, often, of some idea or politics or social behavior. I don't know if theatre or any other art or all arts together can save the world of humanity from destroying itself. But I do believe creative thinking about the crucial issues facing we humans can save us. And I believe artists can be the barometer that alerts us humans to the consequences of our own failings. One of my teachers, Robert Brustein, the founder and former artistic director of the Yale Repertory Theatre and the American Repertory Theatre at Harvard, used to tell us that a play will not change the world, but it is our mission, among other things, to speak truth to power. However,

over the years, I've learned that power already knows the truth but seeks to avoid, hide, ignore, edit, or suppress truth, subordinating it to the vested interests of power. Therefore, I feel it's imperative to speak truth to all people who are willing to listen in the hope that they, the people, can be empowered to make a change, to create wholesome, progressive policies that can begin to heal our severely wounded human family and our ailing mother earth. This does not mean preaching to the masses, although I don't rule that out. A good preacher can do wonders; look at MLK. It means not being afraid to tackle the forbidden issues, the ideas that may be uncomfortable or a perspective that stands opposed to what is officially acceptable.

*The Sorcerer's Apprentice* is essentially a cautionary tale that says that the young and inexperienced should learn from their elders or suffer dire consequences. On still a deeper level it "is a timeless tale of the penalties and consequences of power in inexperienced hands," wrote Marianna Mayer in her version of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice—A Greek Fable*, published by Bantam Skylark Books. She further points out that: "The story can be traced through eighteen hundred years and has spawned works of classical music, poetry, dramatic plays and prose. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century [C.E.], the brilliant Greek writer and satirist, Lucian of Samosata, included one of the earliest versions of the fable, in dialogue form, in his collection of works entitled *The Lie Fancier*. Here the sorcerer is an enigmatic character, and the impetuous apprentice is a young man and by no means a match for a company of bewitched brooms.

"In subsequent versions written during the Middle Ages and the romantic era [roughly, 6th—19th centuries], the sorcerer was depicted as a sinister force whose powers were derived from the black arts [sic]. Perhaps a major reason for this interpretation can be attributed to the real-life figure Dr. Johann Faustus, who lived in Germany during the sixteenth century. A magician and astrologer, Faustus was credited with supernatural powers acquired through black magic. So famous was he that after his death Johann Spiers in 1587 published a nonfiction account of his life, *The History of Dr. Faustus, the Notorious Magician and Master of the Black Art*. Immediately popular, the German edition was soon translated into many other languages. No doubt the English edition was the impetus for the Elizabethan dramatist Christopher Marlowe's play *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, written in 1592. Moreover, literary scholars agree that Marlowe's play was the inspiration for Goethe's verse epic, *Faust*, begun in 1772 but not completed until 1831.

"Today the tale is known to a wide public through the delightful symphonic poem *L'apprenti sorcier* composed by Paul Dukas (1865-1935). The Brothers Grimm added the folktale to their collection of stories, and Walt Disney Studios turned music and story into an animated film with Mickey Mouse as the confounded apprentice."

All present versions of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* are beholden to the myriad versions of the past. The musical version that composer Carman Moore (my first cousin) and I have created for Seattle Children's Theatre, working closely with Linda Hartzell, has gone through 14 drafts which started with a little girl who hated having to babysit her younger brother, through the daughter of a sorceress who instead of succeeding her mother as the local sorceress aspired to be a dancer in New York, through a New Orleans voodoo queen based on Marie Laveau, through to the current draft about a healer of the environment whose supernatural powers enable her to be conversant with nature in her enchanted forest and who must deal with a pesky young boy who stumbles into her forest and soon aspires to be her apprentice.

"The Sorcerer's Apprentice is essentially a cautionary tale that says that the young and inexperienced should learn from their elders or suffer dire consequences."

