



THE NEVERENDING STORY
BASED UPON THE NOVEL BY MICHAEL ENDE
ADAPTED BY DAVID S CRAIG



The Neverending Story

Based upon the novel by Michael Ende

Adapted by David S. Craig

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Creativity Today
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The Neverending Story by David S. Craig

David S. Craig is a theatre artist whose work I have admired since I first became aware of him during a talent scouting trip to Canada just after the Millennium that was sponsored by the Canadian Embassy here in Washington, DC. David and I immediately found common interests and a shared aesthetic. I was delighted, therefore, when David came to me in 2006 with the idea of adapting Michael Ende's masterpiece The Neverending Story for my Theatre for Young Audiences, Imagination Stage, located in Bethesda, MD, right outside our Nation's capital. I knew that if anyone possessed the skill and theatrical knowledge to make a successful play out of this epic and fantastical novel, David was the one.

The size and scope of the project led us to approach Artistic Director Linda Hartzell at The Seattle Children's Theatre in order to plan a co-commission. She was enthusiastic to take part in the project and we agreed that David would write the play for a west coast premiere production in Seattle, to be followed soon afterwards by an east coast premiere, with an entirely separate design and cast, at Imagination Stage. With his background as a director as well as a playwright, David created a script that could be performed with 9 actors and which made good use of doubling, puppets and other techniques that would suggest all kinds of impossible-to-stage moments including the death of Atreyu's horse in a swamp; a flying luck dragon; a giant spider; and the boy Bastian jumping from the real world into the world of Fantastica. When I saw the premiere in Seattle, I knew that there were several staging choices that would not be possible at my theatre which has a thrust stage rather than a proscenium. David was open to re-working his script in order to make the most of the Imagination Stage facilities. In fact, I can say that I have never met a playwright more willing to adjust his work in order to accommodate a director. David is endlessly inventive and always has three options up his sleeve for how to solve the problem at hand.!

I was very pleased with our production of *The Neverending Story* which introduced about 15,000 young people in our community to a fantasy writer who should be better known. The script, as written by David, achieves the perfect balance between a compelling story about a little boy overcoming grief at the loss of his mother with an exciting adventure that gives theatre artists the opportunity to pull out all the production stops and creatively solve the story-telling challenges in the piece. At its foundation, The Neverending Story is about the importance of creativity. And in David S. Craig's creative treatment, this theme is brought home with drama, humor and inspiration. I cannot recommend the work or the playwright highly enough!

Sincerely,

Janet Stanford
Artistic Director
Imagination Stage

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Synopsis

Hiding in the attic of his school, Bastian begins to read and, unseen to him, the story is enacted below. Fantastica, a land of stories, is in danger; The Nothing engulfs everything in its path. The Childlike Empress chooses an unlikely hero, Atreyu, a boy of Bastian's age, to go on a quest to save their world. Atreyu's adventure takes him through the Swamps of Sadness, to Morla the Turtle, Ygramul, the Many, and the maze of the Southern Oracle. He loses his horse, Artax, but gains the friendship of Falkor, the Luck Dragon, until he faces the werewolf Gmork who is bent on the destruction, not only of Fantastica, but of imagination itself. But in the end, it is not Atreyu who is the hero. At the climax of the story, it is Bastian's belief in a story, which takes the audience to the surprising and emotional conclusion.



The Neverending Story has captivated the imagination of many since the original publication over 30 years ago of Michael Ende's fantasy novel. The book remains on the Top 10 in Sales for Dutton Children's Books, with 14 editions subsequently published by Dutton.

The three feature length film adaptations garnered the attendance of nearly 10 million people in North America alone. This story continues to generate the subject material for film, merchandise, game, and fan websites worldwide. Whether being captured in the world of Fantastica through the pages of a book, screen of a movie theatre, or see it come alive on stage, *The Neverending Story* continues to

enthrall its audience.

This adaptation of *The Neverending Story* has been authorized by Verlag fur Kindertheater

"Neverending Thrills... Considering the high calibre of the adaptation, it should come as no surprise to learn that it is the handiwork of David S. Craig."

—4 ½ out of 5 stars. John Coulburn, Toronto Sun



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Note from the Playwright

My first exposure to *The Neverending Story* was through the famous film by Wolfgang Peterson released in 1984. My family loved the extraordinary characters, the two heroes (Bastian the fearful and Atreyu the brave), and the high stakes drama of Fantastica, a world of stories, facing destruction by the Nothing. But it was later, when I read the novel that I really began to appreciate the scope of German novelist Michael Ende's vision. Ende believed that the imaginative journey was essential not only to our health but to our freedom and he did not, as modern literature for young people so often does, belittle the threat. As a boy, he had lived through the Second World War and as a teenager the Allied occupation. He knew happy endings are not guaranteed. They have to be earned. Like Frodo facing Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings* or Harry Potter facing Voldermort in *Harry Potter*, Ende has crafted a hero's journey where huge obstacles must be overcome with sacrifice, determination and, ultimately, with an act of imagination. I believe we are all on such a journey and it is in that spirit in which I present this play. - David S. Craig



"The Neverending Story is a perfect balance of stunning visual displays, clear and concise plot, and engaging performances."
— Bess Rowan, *Huffington Post.com*



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Production History

The Neverending Story was commissioned in 2006 by the Imagination Stage (Janet Stanford, Artistic Director) and the Seattle Children's Theatre (Linda Hartzell, Artistic Director). It was subsequently produced in the 2007/2008 season as follows:

West Coast Premiere: Seattle Children's Theatre - December 7, 2007

East Coast Premiere: Imagination Stage - June 28, 2008

The play was subsequently performed by the following professional theatres:

The Orlando Repertory Theatre, Orlando, Florida - September 2008

The First Stage Theatre Company, Milwaukee, Wisconsin - March 2009

The Growing Stage Theatre for Young Audiences, Netcong, New Jersey - April 2009

The Childsplay Theatre, Tempe, Arizona - April 2009

The Dallas Children's Theatre, Dallas, Texas - June 2009

Roseneath Theatre, Toronto, Ontario (directed by the playwright) - February 2012

Kaleidoscope Theatre, Victoria, British Columbia - December 2013



**"If fantastic tales were houses, *The Neverending Story* " would be prime real estate."
- Joe Adcock, Seattle Post-Intelligencer**



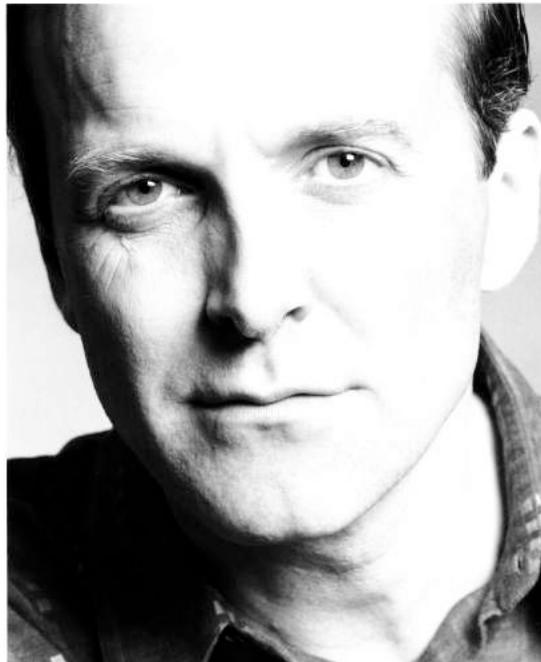
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The Playwright

David S. Craig is one of Canada's most prolific and successful dramatists. He has written twenty-nine professionally produced dramatic works including his hit comedy *Having Hope at Home* and the internationally acclaimed *Danny, King of the Basement* which has been seen by over half a million people in North America alone. Other successful plays include *Smokescreen*, which has been translated into five languages, his award winning adaptation of Carlo Goldoni's *The Fan* and his adaptation of Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story* which premiered at the Seattle Children's Theatre and has had productions all over North America. His one-man show *Napalm the Magnificent* was performed extensively over a ten year period including a commercial run at the John Houseman Theatre in Manhattan.

Mr. Craig's work has won numerous awards including: The Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding Production (three times), the Chalmers New Play Award (three times), the Rideau Award, The Canada Council Prize and The Writer's Guild Prize for Radio Drama. Toronto's NOW Magazine named Mr. Craig, "One of Canada's Top Twenty Playwrights."





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Review Highlights

"Neverending Thrills... Considering the high calibre of the adaptation, it should come as no surprise to learn that it is the handiwork of David S. Craig."

— 4 ½ out of 5 stars. *John Coulburn, Toronto Sun*

"*The Neverending Story* is a perfect balance of stunning visual displays, clear and concise plot, and engaging performances."

— *Bess Rowan, Huffington Post.com*

"If fantastic tales were houses, "*The Neverending Story*" would be prime real estate. On one level it's a gripping adventure, full of weird and wondrous creatures, some of them human. On another level it is a thoughtful meditation on depression and nihilism. A third level accommodates one of those archetypal hero-quest tales. Surviving ordeals in pursuit of a goal, a boy becomes a man. But what I like best about this story is its capacity to face inescapable facts in the midst of a fabulous array of escape strategies."

— *Joe Adcock, Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

"Beguiling... "*The Neverending Story*" is as much about the power of imagination and friendship as it is about colorful demons and otherworldly locales."

— *Misha Berson, The Seattle Times*

"Craig's adaptation and First Stage production captures the adventure and magic of the story, creating the theatrical equivalent of a real page turner."

— *Elaine Schmidt, Journal Sentinel. Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

"The power of imagination overflows the Todd Wehr Theater when *The Neverending Story* arrived this weekend courtesy of First Stage Children's Theater."

— *Peggy Sue Dunigan, Third Coast Digest*

"Every year Seattle Children's Theatre presents a holiday play that follows a predictable course. *The Neverending Story*, David S. Craig's stage adaptation of Michael Ende's popular novel, rises to a higher level, educating and entertaining while telling the story of a bookish boy who becomes a hero."

— *Alice Kalso, The Seattle Herald*



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TORONTO
SUN
torontosun.com

NEVERENDING THRILLS

4 ½ OUT 5 STARS
by John Coulbourn
February 29th 2012

TORONTO - I've long suspected, on the not-so-rare occasions when politicians deride the artists and the arts, that their derision is motivated not so much by disrespect as by envy, pure and simple.

After all, to rule the world, or even the smallest corner of it, a politician must either rely on brute force (which, not surprisingly often proves unpopular) or do what artists do every day – awaken the imagination of those around them.

That is, of course, a subject and a theme beautifully explored in Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story* – a book that tells the story of another book, one that exists only by its power to awaken the imagination of a child.

[...] Now, it's given us an appropriately inventive stageplay too, one which opened on the mainstage of Young People's Theatre. [...] **Considering the high calibre of the adaptation, it should come as no surprise to learn that it is the handiwork of David S. Craig**, erstwhile artistic director of Roseneath Theatre (the show's producers) and the imagination behind *Danny, King of the Basement*, which must surely rank as one of the finest pieces of theatre for young audiences Toronto has ever produced.

His tale starts in pretty contemporary fashion, as young Bastian, played by Natasha Greenblatt, prepares for school, already dreading what appears to be a regular encounter with the school bullies that plague his life. With his widowed father's injunctions to quit being such a dreamer still ringing in his ears, young Bastian hasn't even made it to school however, before he's run afoul of the aforementioned bullies and is forced to take refuge in a bookstore, where, to spite the child-hating owner, he appropriates a book, which soon captures not only his attention but his imagination.

Vicariously, he shares the adventures of the heroic Atreyu (Adamo Ruggiero) and his horse (Billy Merasty) as they ride off to save the Childlike Empress (Kate Besworth) from the inexplicable malaise that is infecting her, and their world from the depredations of the Nothing, which is overtaking them all.

But while young Bastian starts out as an observer, he soon discovers (as voracious young readers have since the days of Gutenberg, one suspects) that he has become part of the story that entralls him.

In directing his own script – itself a revision of work he did in Seattle – Craig conspires with his design team (set designer Glenn Davidson, costume designer Lori Hickling and sound designer Rick Sacks) to create an alternate world that excites the imagination of a young audience while still leaving plenty of work for them to do to get involved. It's a world of adventure, full of fanciful spiders and turtles and giants and dwarves that conspires to draw us into the story instead of simply shoving us into it.

In what proves to be an 85-minute treasure hunt, Craig piles on fun, creating a host of adventures, before he reveals that, on many levels, all the treasure we could ever need is stored up inside us and only needs to be unlocked so it can spill out into the world.



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THE
NEVERENDING STORY
NOW | March 8-15, 2012 |
VOL 31 NO 28

**TWO BOYS - ONE A CHARACTER IN A BOOK, THE OTHER READING THAT BOOK -
DISCOVER THE IMPORTANCE OF IMAGINATION**

If you want to show children that books can be magical, take them to see *The Neverending Story*, David Craig's adaptation of Michael Ende's family classic.

Set in the imaginary land of Fantastica, a world of stories, and also in our own world, it brings together Atreyu, a young hero from Fantastica, and Bastian, a human boy who becomes inextricably connected to Fantastica. It's a rich, involving narrative that some know from the 1984 film version.

The Roseneath Theatre production, presented by Young People's Theatre, goes straight to the heart of the tale's enchantment while also acknowledging the easily identifiable side of Bastian's life: his sadness over his mother's death, the bullies who scare him at school, his desire to escape from an unhappy life.

Finding a copy of a book called *The Neverending Story*, he starts to read about Atreyu's quest to save Fantastica from the Nothing, a blackness growing his world. Increasingly drawn into the story, Bastian eventually helps Atreyu fulfill his mission, despite the efforts of the villainous werewolf Gmork, who exists in both worlds.

Director Craig has assembled an inventive cast, most playing multiple roles, to help conjure the magic of the story. Adamo Ruggiero and a cross-dressing Natasha Greenblatt made good foils as Atreyu and Bastian, the latter first doubting the story's reality and later accepting his part in it.

Richard Lee exudes playfulness and optimism as Falkor, the Luck Dragon who helps Atreyu reach his goal, while Derek Scott is a menacing Gmork and also a tiny figure reminiscent of Craig's bouffon character, Napalm. Billy Merasty has fun as Artax, Atreyu's palomino horse, and Walter Borden and Charlotte Moore provide much of the play's comedy in various cameos. Kate Besworth gives dignity to the Childlike Empress, ruler of Fantastica, and Dalal Badr's spider Ygramul has a sinister, scary presence.

If this were a big-budget, commercial production, I would expect special effects for days. Instead, Craig's wisely opted for a simple design, with colourful, evocative costumes by Lori Hickling, Rick Sacks's suggestive sound design and a set by Glenn Davidson that makes great use of white and black curtains to create landscapes and help define characters. The black curtains, in fact, are the essence of the Nothing's encroaching presence in Fantastica; the Nothing, it turns out, is a world without imagination, and it's clearly a place where no one would choose to live.

For all its entertainment value, this fine theatrical version of *The Neverending Story* also instructs: in keeping our imaginations active, we also invigorate our lives.



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THE
HUFFINGTON
POST

Roses are Red: Roseneath Theatre's
"The Neverending Story" at NYU's Skirball Center
by Bess Rowan

I have always believed that children are the most honest audiences. They do not have the social graces to fake a reaction, they do not care what the critics say, and they do not believe that a show that they don't understand must be a piece of high art. Roseneath Theatre's company of actors and artists obviously understand this, and so their version of *The Neverending Story* is a perfect balance of stunning visual displays, clear and concise plot, and engaging performances.

It doesn't hurt that the story is one that I see as particularly relevant today. At the start we are introduced to Bastian, excellently played by Natasha Greenblatt, who loves to read but doesn't see himself as good at much else. When he has the opportunity to get his hands on a book called *The Neverending Story*, he picks it up and begins to read in the attic of his school. As he reads, we the audience see him as well as the fantasy world that lives in the book. The constant shifting from the frame of the story itself and the reading of the story a la *The Princess Bride* sends a really powerful message about the importance of imagination and creativity in a world that can seem to fight against such "impractical" things.

Natasha Greenblatt's performance in particular stands out as she brings a book-obsessed boy to life. Her comic timing and simple charm set the tone for the rest of the production. The acting and energy of the company overall is simply a pleasure to watch, which results in performances that fit in with the over-the-top and fantastical set and costumes while still remaining grounded and relatable. I was completely taken in and gladly gave myself over to their storytelling.

I also have to say that the set and costumes are works of art. Set designer Glenn Davidson's minimal design consists of two small downstage areas to the left and the right of the acting space which almost form a false proscenium, while the acting space itself is surrounded in the back by a series of white curtains. As the show progresses these strips of white curtain morph and transform all with the assistance of a few poles and some physically expressive actors. I couldn't help but think of these curtains as a visual metaphor for the act of writing, as they became the blank pieces of paper acted upon by the words of a story.

Director and playwright David S. Craig is also an actor in this piece, and it is this kind of total commitment and versatility that is evident in all of the performers and the production as a whole. *The Neverending Story* comes across like your best friend saying "It's a long story" and then telling you an amazing tale. For Roseneath Theatre, a rose by any other name might smell as sweet, but I doubt that the others could create a performance like this.



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SCT'S 'Neverending Story' is satisfying on several levels

Joe Adcock, PI Theatre Critic

December 25, 2007

If fantastic tales were houses, "*The Neverending Story*" would be prime real estate.

On one level it's a gripping adventure, full of weird and wondrous creatures, some of them human. On another level it is a thoughtful meditation on depression and nihilism. A third level accommodates one of those archetypal hero-quest tales. Surviving ordeals in pursuit of a goal, a boy becomes a man. But what I like best about this story is its capacity to face inescapable facts in the midst of a fabulous array of escape strategies.

[...] At the Children's Theatre, Gabriel Baron plays Bastian and Michael Place is Atreyu. Seven additional actors play a total of 21 supporting roles. The cast combines to bring their story's action vividly to life. Author Michael Ende's 1979 novel (in German) has given rise to a seemingly never-ending line of spinoffs: three movies, an animated TV series, a live action TV series, an opera, a ballet, a video game and, of course, this stage adaptation (by David S. Craig, directed by David Bennett).

The tale, for all its gaudy, goofy incidents, deals with depression. For Bastian, losing his mother and being pursued by bullies are real-life causes of despair. For the characters in the stolen book, the issue is symbolic. The Nothing, a cosmic force, is destroying Fantastica. The citizens thereof have a tendency toward despair, sorrow and nihilism. So rallying defensive action is Atreyu's tremendous task.

Being a muscular action/adventure hero, Atreyu suffers greatly. He is tempted to give up, but ... you know the drill. Things are a bit trickier for non-muscular and non-heroic Bastian. His stolen book -- titled, as it happens, "*The Neverending Story*" -- is a perfect temporary mood enhancer, in which he participates with active abandon.

But when "*Neverending*" does, in fact, end, there's still the sorrowful home situation and the brutal bullies to face. This is the point in the play where we face the fact that literature and theater are wonderful, life enhancing, possibly even life saving. But they don't vanquish death and bullies.