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by Scott Wiser

Review: Theatre UAF's high-energy children's production is a tale for all ages

"This Girl Laughs, This Girl Cries, This Girl Does Nothing," a Theatre UAF presentation, is a fairy tale coming of age story about the lives of three sisters from their pre-teen years through the confusing quarter-life crisis era of adulthood. Parents will recognize this phase when your adult child moves back home, and you realize that your dragon-slayer daughter never learned how to do laundry.

Identical triplets with vastly different personalities coping with the loss of their mother are abandoned in the wilderness by their father who has been duped by his second wife. Alone, deep in the woods, faced with a new journey ahead of them, one girl laughs, one girl cries and one girl does nothing.

Albienne (Emily Ross), the oldest and a baker, heads east, becoming a warrior hero. Beatrix (Sarah Williams), a sun lover, heads west hoping to reconnect with their father. Carmen (Paloma Polanco), the youngest, who carries the world on her shoulders, stays in the woods and Dick Proennekes it, building a home for others while learning to communicate with animals ... once she stops eating them. Despite great successes and wondrous experiences, the triplets are never quite satisfied until, as adults, they are able to reconnect with the personalities of their pre-tragedy childhood.

This theater for young audiences production is an insightful, funny

All one has to do is look at the young humans in the audience and see them on the edge of their seats to know that this play connects perfectly with its intended target.

Abigail Van Patter directs the action-packed play that never stops for a breather. Dazzling umbrella choreography, dance sequences and the occasional run of rhymes keeps children's attention, waiting for the next unexpected turn of events. Stick-figure style animated scenes playing on a background screen enhance the telling of the story. Screens at stage left and right show the characters in shadow as the narrators describe the journeys. The set, designed by Lara Lotze, is a fully functioning playground creatively used to tell numerous stories helping show-goers to enter this fairy tale world at the edge of children's imagination. The physicality of the play drives the energy that is sustained throughout the hour running time.

For young audience members interested in performing, watching Mary Conlin as the Narrator is a tremendous lesson on how to transform into different characters by using subtle alterations of the body. The three sisters (Ross, Williams and Polanco) shine as the leads giving heartfelt and humorous performances while also taking on different roles and serving as co-narrators for each other's stories. Freddy Gryder, playing the father and other roles, using silly voices and over the top movements,

has a knack for connecting with young audiences.

This play does not speak down to children. It shows in adventure form some of the confusing aspects of growing up. People may never have bested Vikings, taught an entire city to dance or scolded a matchmaking badger, yet audiences will connect with the sisters' difficulties associated with finding themselves. The story told is deeply engaging and moving. After 20 years' worth of experiences, in a journey that literally travels full circle, the sister's reunification is one that brings out tears of joy.

"This Girl Laughs, This Girl Cries, This Girl Does Nothing" runs at 7 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sundays through Feb. 18 at the Salisbury Theatre on the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus. For more information or tickets, visit www.uaf.edu/theatre/flm.



"This Girl Laughs, This Girl Cries, This Girl Does Nothing" written by Finegan Kruckemeyer and directed by Abigail Van Patter, features university students Emily Ross, Freddy Gryder, Mary Conlin, Paloma Polanco and Sarah Williams.
Kade Mendelowitz photo