

“Quest” An Original Circus-Theater Production

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★★★ I am not sure how many people are aware of The Actors Gymnasium located at The Noyes Cultural Center in Evanston. This is a training ground for the circus and performing arts and an organization closely involved with many of our local theater companies. For those who have watched 500 Clowns, or attend some of the circus-type Lookingglass productions, this is the organization that helps them in many ways. Since 1995, The Actors Gymnasium has been guided to bring performance art to theater, making live theater as much fun as perhaps a rock concert or even a circus.



They are a training ground for many young gymnasts, trapeze artists, tumblers and otherwise circus-type performers. They are doing a performance art production, in fact, the World Premiere, called “Quest”, which is loosely based on Leo Tolstoy’s parable, “The Three Questions”. We begin with a quiz show of sorts. Four young contestants are to be tested on their knowledge to answer the three questions- When is the most important time in your life? What is the most important thing in your life ? Who are the most important people in your life ?

While the questions are asked a bit differently, this is a simpler story, and while we still have a king, it is not the same exact story that we are watching, so we are more in tune with the movement of those on stage. Part of what we are watching is the ability of the students that have been trained at this center. In this version, the protagonist (Flora Bare) asks three simple questions which begins the next 72 minutes for answer seeking by our contestant (Kate Braland, a very agile and attractive young trapeze artists).

During this time, she meets the King (played to perfection by hat juggler Amanda Crockett who has performed with Cirque du Soleil) and while the hat bit was a bit longer than needed, part of what this portion did was establish that “It is good to be the king”! The other people that Kate meets and tumbles, flies and swings with are David Corlewand and Edgar Ortiz- both of these men are multi-talented with ability on the trapeze, ropes, juggling, tumbling and even playing musical instruments.

There are also many students of the school in the production: Maddy Aaronson, Nico Anon, Abbi Baran, Nuala Brennan, Griffin DiStasi, Alexa Dolinko, Annabelle Gross, Lia Kelly, Becca Miller, Ella Roberts and Maggie Stone. These are the TEEN ensemble members, but there is also a group of YOUNG performers (grammar school): Emerson Catlin, Ezra Danzig, Simone Danzig, Jude Sims and Sadie Sims.

You may recognize some of these last names: This show was written and directed by Leslie Buxbaum Danzig (so you know where the Danzig kids got their talent) and the Actors Gymnasium itself has for the artistic director Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi (a real circus background and part of the team at Lookingglass Theatre). It is due to these ladies and their staff that people who attend and are trained here “learn to fly”-physically, emotionally and creatively.



I had never attended one of their shows, and when invited, I invited my grandkids to come with so I could get the eye of a young person for you, my readers. Only Rebecca (six) was available, but she was able to bring her “best friend”, Julia. Julia felt the show was great and she loved the part where all the kids came out with their drums- wow!

Rebecca also loved the show, feeling that when the performers were up almost in the beams of the roof was a special time. I watched them for reactions and found that after the first 10 minutes or so (the quiz show part) they were glued to the action, looking high and low, watching each move and where the performers might be next. When we first arrived, Jane and I thought they might be a bit young for this show- we were wrong! They were into it and felt that they would like to see another one.

Meanwhile, this particular show “Quest” will continue at Noyes Cultural Arts Center , located in Evanston at 927 Noyes Street (just East of Ridge Avenue) through March 19th with performances as follows:

Fridays 7:30 p.m.

Saturdays 4:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

Sundays 3 p.m.

Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$15 for kids. To order yours (reserved seats) call the box office at 847-328-2785 or visit www.actorsgymnasium.org **USE JOURNEY for \$10%off your tickets.**

running time 80 minutes-no intermission

There is plenty of parking at the Cultural Arts Center and on the street. The NOYES “purple” station is a short walk from the building and if you need to grab a bite, check out Als’ Deli across the street.

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