

# Acrobatics, trapeze and philosophy intersect in Northwestern alumna's original play

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Source: Cole Simon

An acrobat performs in “Marnie & Phil: A Circus Love Letter” at The Actors Gymnasium in 2016. Similar feats can be seen in “Quest,” a circus theater production that tackles some of life’s philosophical questions, opens Saturday at The Actors Gymnasium.

[Jordan Moreau](#), Reporter  
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Northwestern alumna Leslie Buxbaum Danzig (Communication '07) examines existential questions through circus theater in her original play, “Quest,” opening at The Actors Gymnasium in Evanston Saturday.

“Quest” is an adaptation of Russian author Leo Tolstoy’s short story, “The Three Questions,” in which a king ponders three questions to gain a better understanding about life and human nature. The show will open Feb. 11 and run until Mar. 19.

Danzig’s play centers on Robin, a high school student, who is transported to an alternate world in the middle of a trivia game show. To get back to reality, she must answer three introspective questions, which focus on difficult issues concerning what it means to be human, Danzig said.



“Often when you ask a question and there’s a quick or definite answer,” Danzig said, “you open a door and the door closes. In this case, you open the door and it stays open for quite a while.”

The five-person cast includes another NU alum, David Corlew (Communication '13), who said his time at the university prepared him to be in this show. As an undergraduate, Corlew directed “The Tempest” for Lovers & Madmen and performed in “The Verona Project.”

Corlew plays the hermit, a character who holds some answers to the questions. The hermit’s “wise, ridiculous character” fits in with the show’s tone and setting, which has similar elements to “Alice in Wonderland” and “The Wizard of Oz,” Corlew said. All three works follow young girls through a journey in an alternate world, he said.

“It’s lighthearted, self-aware and pokes fun at itself,” he said.

Acrobatics such as juggling, trapeze and stage combat help further the whimsical nature of the story. Since “Quest” is being performed at The Actors Gymnasium, she wanted to feature the local theater school’s unique talents, Danzig said.

The school is known for its use of circus apparatus in storylines, said Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi, the school’s co-founder and the show’s artistic director and choreographer.

“You have to come see it to experience it,” Hernandez-DiStasi said. “It’s very unique and hard to describe. (The circus theater) gives it a different kind of feeling that makes it very entertaining.”

In addition to circus elements, the show also incorporates choreographed dance and live music. Hernandez-DiStasi said the range of artistic modes used makes the show enjoyable to a wide audience.

Danzig said she hopes people are not only entertained by the show, but also take the time to reflect on their lives in the same way Robin does throughout her journey.

“I hope it’s exciting for people,” she said. “It’s exciting to see all of the skills that these performers have (used to tell) a theatrical story. It’s exciting and fun and hopefully quite moving and funny.”

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