

Review: Marnie & Phil: A Circus Love Letter/The Actors Gymnasium

RECOMMENDED

Reviewing “Marnie & Phil: A Circus Love Letter” at the Actors Gymnasium is difficult. Not because the plot is particularly complex or because there’s a difficult-to-articulate question at hand. Simply put: the show works well on all levels and goes above and beyond in most. Sentimental and sweet, the acting is done in service to the story, the aerial work is beautiful, and the clowning is funny and tragic. The story is served, the story is simple, and the story is kind.

“Marnie & Phil” details the aging and twining friendship of aerialist Marnie (respective to age, Sadie Sims, Lindsey Noel Whiting, Sylvia Hernandez-Distasi) and clown Phil (Nico Añón, Samuel Taylor, David Catlin). Their life journey, lasting many years, weaves in and out of each other’s scope, but performing and sending letters always remain a constant.

In each stage of life, the clowning or the acrobatics offer a new dimension to “Marnie & Phil”: their learning curve and lifelong goals, their successes in the arts, the ways they’re failing to cope with aging. Phil’s trio of clowns is heartbreaking and is alone worth seeing. Along with the swarm of deliveries via unicyclists and the aerial acts, the eye-candy here always has an edge to it.

What really glues the show together are all the young artists. Walking in, I wasn’t aware that the cast was composed primarily of students and it made me hesitant to review the show. But all of them stand together and perform wonderfully. Javen Ulambayar, teacher and performer, deserves a shoutout both for his wrangling as well as his marvelous acrobatic work.

Simplicity in a circus seems strange. But everything in “Marnie & Phil” serves the story being told and it’s a simple one: how love persists, both for art and for people.

“Marnie & Phil” is fun, sweet, and thoughtful. Talk it up. (Jay Van Ort)

The Actors Gymnasium at Noyes Cultural Arts Center, 927 Noyes, Evanston, (847)328-2795, actorsgymnasium.org, \$15-\$25. Through March 20.



Bottom to Top: Sadie Sims, Lindsey Noel Whiting, Sylvia Hernandez-Distasi/Photo: Cole Simon

