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'All the Time in the World'

By Brian Murphy

The Actors Gymnasium celebrates its 10th winter circus with "All the Time in the World," a daring and beautifully crafted show written and directed by Kerry Catlin.



The highly talented ensemble, represented by performers of varied ages, showcases Ms. Catlin's insightful themes, such as the pitfalls of prioritizing work over spending time with loved ones, and wrestle with the emotions of theatergoers both young and old.

Each Actors Gym performance holds high-flying and physically demanding acts. Once again, the uber-talented Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi – Circus Choreographer, Artistic Director and Co-Founder of the Actors Gymnasium – elevates her teen, young and professional actors to spectacular heights as they bound around, across and above the intimate confines of the stage.

Evanston is lucky to have Ms. Hernandez-DiStasi. A legend in the world of circus, last month she, and her family members were inducted into the Circus Ring of Fame in Sarasota, Fla. They performed internationally on their own and with the prestigious Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus as the Hernandez Troupe. Locally, she has received multiple Joseph Jefferson awards for her choreography ("Lookingglass Alice," among others). Though most Actors Gymnasium cast are not yet old enough to be professionals, her technical prowess is on full display, and, as in shows this reviewer has seen over the years, these kids shine.

Ms. Catlin's poignant yet bonkers story involves young Trudy and her wonderfully active imagination. Her parents (David Corlew and Megan Mallouk are excellent) and older sister are perpetually lost in their cell phones, either distracted by work or social media. If all her loved ones disappear into their own worlds, why shouldn't Trudy?

Problems arise when Trudy's parents discover she has an imaginary friend named Rigatoni (a vibrant Kathleen Hoil). Such flights of fancy do not align with Dr. Spock's model of a normal child, and they rush her to Dr. Paice (it is always a joy to watch Lindsey Noel Whiting onstage). Dr. Paice sees no problems with their dilemma, until years later, when the parents return with a now-distracted teenage Trudy, who has (heaven forbid) forgotten about the imaginary friend from her childhood.

A time-bending trip through to the imaginary circus of Trudy's youth provides an opportunity for acrobatics, juggling, clowning and the like. In addition to the catchy, genuinely heartfelt original music performed by the cast, some standout performances include a dual lyra (hoop) routine with Mr. Corlew and Ms. Mallouk, six members of the teen ensemble in a gravity-defying rope act, and Ms. Whiting up on a manipulated lyra, contorting while gleefully breaking the fourth wall and reciting a multitude of corny clock jokes.

Confusing as it may seem on paper, it all makes sense on stage, with a perfect blend of mania, bafflement and heart to go along with its incredibly skilled cast and crew. Those who do not see a circus show every so often, are doing themselves a disservice. "All the Time in the World" is an excellent place to start.

"All the Time in the World" runs through March 24 at the Noyes Cultural Arts Center, 927 Noyes Street. Tickets are available at www.actorsgymnasium.org or by calling 847-328-2795.

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