


59°
 High: 58° Low: 47°
 Fri Sat Sun Mon

STANFORD BLOOD CENTER 

Donate blood 12/12 – 12/24
and support local cancer patients!
Learn more.


[Log in](#) [Register](#)



[Home](#) [News](#) [Town Square](#) [Blogs](#) [A&E](#) [Sports](#) [Real Estate](#) [Print Edition](#) [Classifieds](#) [Shop](#) [Visit](#) [Join](#) [Contact](#)



Arts & Entertainment - October 21, 2016

Sister sojourners

Dragon's 'On the Verge (or the Geography of Yearning)' is an atemporal adventure

by Karla Kane

In previous reviews, I've mentioned Dragon Productions Theatre Company's (and my own) inclination toward stories that involve some element of time travel. Perhaps none better exemplify this than its current production, Eric Overmyer's surreal "On the Verge (or the Geography of Yearning)," which is full of (to quote one character) mindbending "chronokinesis."

The play, which premiered in 1985, revolves around the adventures of three intrepid Victorian-lady explorers. At show's start, the trio has joined forces (and left all porters, sherpas and other assistants behind) to undertake an exploration of the mysterious, uncharted "Terra Incognita." Stalwart Mary (Doll Piccotto), the elder and leader of the group, is a Boston anthropologist especially experienced in African travel and prone to anecdotes about cultural rites and behaviors. She's joined by Fanny Cranberry (Dragon's founder and executive artistic director, Meredith Hagedorn), the most politically and socially conservative of the three. The only married woman on the expedition (hubby Grover stays at home), Fanny writes about her explorations for the tabloids and illustrates a series of generic postcards to send from Terra Incognita back to Terre Haute. Rounding out the group is Alexandra (Maria Giere Marquis). The youngest of the crew, Alex is full of youthful exuberance and an appreciation for new-fangled technology (Kodak cameras) and ideas (women wearing trousers). She's also a linguist, obsessed with wordplay and rhymes (to the irritation of the others at times), and started her explorer career in the Himalayas, amongst magical monks and abominable snowmen. While they get on each other's nerves by trying to one-up one another with adventure tales, they also form a tight bond as sisters-in-travel.

The ladies set out on their journey (beginning with a memorable scene of them packing up) and traverse beach, dense jungle and snowy mountains. Soon, though, they (and we) begin to get the sense that Terra Incognita is unlike any place they've encountered before. They meet odd and unsettling characters, find artifacts — Richard Nixon photos, cream cheese — that won't be invented until well after 1888, and find themselves suddenly using (or "osmosing") terms their 19th-century selves should have no way of knowing. And what's up with those enigmatic eggbeaters? It becomes apparent that the women's location is not merely a question of where but, more importantly, when.

Progressive Alex embraces the future wholeheartedly; ethnographically-minded Mary is intrigued by it; Fanny fears it. They eventually wind up in 1955, where Alex finds herself right at home, Fanny surprisingly finds herself in love with a smooth-talking nightclub owner and Mary finds that her wanderlust is leading her even further into the future.

The concept, story, characters and actors are all appealing, as is much of Overmyer's smart script. However, at 2 1/2 hours, it's overlong, and by play's end, I was hoping for a bit less rambling and a bit more in terms of resolution and explanation as to the point of it all. Is it metaphorical or literal? And why the special emphasis on 1955? Must be the same zeitgeist responsible for "Back to the Future," that other well-known time-travel tale from 1985. On the whole, though, "On the Verge" is an enjoyable, unusual adventure, and the Dragon team does splendidly with the material.



MOST VIEWED STORIES

- East Palo Alto girl, 2, died of blunt-force trauma
- Bad-tasting water due to Hetch Hetchy water reductions
- Lawsuit: Stanford acted with 'deliberate indifference' to reports of sexual assault
- Palo Alto braces for budget deficit
- Palo Alto seeks to snuff out smoke in apartments

[See today's stories](#)




All three women do a terrific job of bringing their characters to life. Piccotto, an experienced Shakespearean actor, imbues Mary's lines with poetic cadence worthy of the Bard and one can't help but admire her blustery, unsinkable spirit. Giere Marquis' Alex is a perfect mix of sass and sweetness, naivety and smarts. And Hagedorn's Fanny, though at first the least interesting of the three, has plenty of endearing and interesting moments. Special mention must go to the fourth cast member, Tom Gough, a master of playing multiple, scene-stealing small roles. In "On the Verge," he appears as, among others, a German-accented cannibal, a fortune telling dragon lady, a beatnik/greaser bridge troll who speaks in rhyme and even a baby yeti (yes, really). Part of the fun of watching the show is wondering in what incarnation he will next appear.

Direction by Karen Altree Piemme keeps the action briskly moving along with well-crafted bits of choreography as the women pantomime hacking their way through the jungle, climbing mountains with rope and bursting into spontaneous dancing (although the theater's configuration means that audience members in some seats will not be able to fully view that baby yeti cameo). The set, lighting and sound design, by Jesse Ploog, William Campbell and Brittany Mellerson, respectively, is simple but effective, with moments of genuine delight, such as a bursts of twinkling starlight and sounds of wildlife. Costumes, by Natalie Barshow, look lovely. And while the use of props isn't always crucial to a production, in this case, the astounding array of trinkets and tools hidden around the stage and used by the characters means the well-done prop design and placement (thanks again to Ploog) is much appreciated.

Dragon's 2017 main-stage series will have the theme "Women Take Center Stage," in keeping with the largely women-run theater company's vision. While that series doesn't begin until January, the skillful direction and acting by the women of "On the Verge," make for a great preview of things to come.

What: "On the Verge (or the Geography of Yearning)"

Where: Dragon Theatre, 2120 Broadway St., Redwood City

When: Through Nov. 6, Thursdays-Saturdays at 8 p.m.; Sundays at 2 p.m.

Cost: \$30 general, \$25 students/seniors

Info: Go to dragonproductions.net

Arts & Entertainment Editor Karla Kane can be emailed at kkane@paweekly.com

Comments

There are no comments yet for this post

Post a comment

Posting an item on Town Square is simple and requires no registration. Just complete this form and hit "submit" and your topic will appear online. Please be respectful and truthful in your postings so Town Square will continue to be a thoughtful gathering place for sharing community information and opinion. All postings are subject to our [TERMS OF USE](#), and may be deleted if deemed inappropriate by our staff.

We prefer that you use your real name, but you may use any "member" name you wish.

Name: *

Select your neighborhood or school community: * Not sure?

Choose a category: *

Since this is the first comment on this story a new topic will also be started in Town Square! Please choose a category that best describes this story.

Comment: *

Optometrist
Dr. Lisa Berkowitz
OPEN MONDAY
THRU SATURDAY



28TH YEAR IN TOWN & COUNTRY VILLAGE
New Location #103
@ Wilby Optical
(650) 618-4220
APPOINTMENTS ONLINE

Weekend
Express
A&E EVENTS

★
Support our Kids
 with a gift to the Palo Alto Weekly Holiday Fund

DONATE HERE

Holiday Fund supports local nonprofits benefiting families and kids




Over 100 Stores

- EXTENDED HOLIDAY HOURS
- GIFT WRAP SERVICE
- CONVENIENT PARKING

HILLSDALE
 SHOPPING CENTER

GINNY KAVANAUGH



183 Vista Verde Way
 Portola Valley
 4 bed | 3.5 bath | Views | \$3,595,000

GINNYKAVANAUGH.COM | CALBRE# 00884747 | COLDWELL BANKER