

Rapunzel Alone: let your hair down as live theatre makes a welcome return

Theatre with Catherine Siggins

Welcome back folks, to live theatre!

Yes, after what feels like an eternity, we are free-range once more, and theaters have opened their doors to flesh and bone punters. I think it's fair to say, it's been a tough three years on everyone, and perhaps most of all on children. Anxious, uncertain times that took their toll on their vulnerable emotional wellbeing, and that was even before tough news abroad.

If you are a parent who wishes to help their child make sense of the pandemic and gently explain to them what is currently unfolding for refugees, while giving them an enchanting couple of hours in a far away land, you could consider taking them to see *Rapunzel Alone*, the new play by 24th Street Theatre, in association with the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts.

Written by award-winning children's playwright, Mike Kenny, it is a modern re-shaping of the popular fairytale set in wartime England, about a girl named Lettie (Tara Alise Cox), who is sent by her parents from London

to escape the Blitz, into the alien world of the English countryside. A much-loved only child of British and Trinidadian heritage, she finds herself alone on a farm with a flinty Jamaican woman, Miss Pierce (Marie-Françoise Theodore), surrounded by hostile village locals. To make matters worse, there's a savage farmyard goose, Gertrude (puppeteer, Matt Curtin) that has it in for her with a vengeance. Lettie must adjust to her new life, her foreign surroundings, the exhausting farm work, her adversarial guardian, and her growing sense of powerlessness.

When it was initially commissioned, Kenny was asked to write a piece about isolation, because of the growing levels of anxiety and depression found in children and adolescents. No one at 24th Street Theatre at that point had any idea about what was going to unfold over the following three years, but like all good classic fairy-tales this play deals with universal themes, which have fitted the new reality, and which will still resonate strongly with any individual, young or old, who has found themselves trapped by their circumstances, whether it be by the winds of fate or one's own inability

to change and grow.

Adding to the magical realism of the story is the engaging production design, which uses minimal staging and imaginative sound and visual elements to great effect. A suspended wall of scrim screens show video footage and animated graphics, drawn by high school senior, Leah Abazari. We hear the voices of Lettie's mother and father but never see them, and throughout, we hear the voice of a narrator, provided by playwright Mike Kenny, leading us through Lettie's experience. You can also access "Lettie's Journal" an interactive book of her sketches on the theatre website.

Happily, the tale ends well. Lettie finds a friend in a local boy, Conrad (William Leon), and a connection to her new home, but not before her desperate actions put her and Miss Pierce on course to a confrontation.

I would agree with artist Dorothea Tanning who said "Art has always been the raft onto which we climb to save our sanity." I suggest you climb into this gentle and endearing tale with your loved ones and take a well earned breather.

Performances of *Rapunzel*



Tara Alise Cox and Marie-Françoise Theodore (Photo by Cooper Bates)

Alone continue through May 1, with performances taking place at 24th Street Theatre on April 9 through May 1: Saturdays at 3 pm & 7:30 pm.; Sundays at 3 pm; except the week of March 12 through March 19, when performances will be at the Wallis Center for the Performing Arts on the following schedule: March 16 at 7 p.m.; Thursday, March 17

at 7 p.m.; Friday, March 18 at 7 p.m.; and Saturday, March 19 at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Tickets to performances at 24th Street Theatre are \$24 for adults; \$15 for students, seniors and teachers; \$10 audiences under 18; and \$2.40 for residents of the theater's surrounding North University Park neighborhood. Tickets to all performances at The Wallis are \$25.

24th Street Theatre is located at 1117 West 24th St., Los Angeles, CA 90007 (at the intersection of 24th and Hoover). The Wallis is located at 9390 N Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly Hills, CA 90210. For reservations and information about performances at both venues, go to www.24thstreet.org

See theatre websites for Covid Safety Requirements.