

# Future Perfect

## *The Dos and Don'ts of Time Travel*

by Mark Cofta

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**T**IME-TRAVEL MOVIES HAVE A "COMMON INTRINSIC PROBLEM," asserts grad student Rachel: "They all suck." Rachel entertainingly debunks the genre while also discovering the real thing in Straw Flower Productions' premiere of Nicholas Wardigo's *The Dos and Don'ts of Time Travel*. Time travel, according to Rachel, is achieved in movies through one of three forces: machination, nature and will, and she describes examples of each, including some advanced ideas on wormholes. Her fervor, expressed by Amanda Schoonover (finally playing a role not adolescent, crazy or both, in yet another mesmerizing performance), entertains successfully — especially for science fiction geeks like me, for whom theater offers little except a few neglected works by George Bernard Shaw and J.B. Priestley.

Rachel's metaphors for time (an ocean rather than a stream, not a line but a plane) and her straightforward insights on Einstein and relativity show Wardigo's skill at making heady concepts clear and personal. The uninitiated glean enough from her pithy lectures to appreciate her clever skewering of scientifically sloppy time-travel films like *Somewhere in Time* and *The Lake House* ("Its suck," Rachel opines, "is blinding").

*The Dos and Don'ts* has more at stake, though: Rachel is involved with Zoey (Kate Brennan and Jen Jaynes), who, by methods eventually clarified, travels through time to care for her lover, Claire (Sarah Milici), dying of cancer at age 29. Why two actresses? Because Zoey runs into herself more than once on her 18 laps through Claire's last two years (each one slightly different from the others), bringing up another fascinating debate inspired by Douglas Adams of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* fame: A simple conversation, Zoey realizes, "dissolves into metaphysics: What pronoun do you use when you talk to yourself?" How do the Zoey's share events that are past for one and future for the other? It's a surprisingly fun problem, and the blue-wigged Brennan and Jaynes make Zoey a likably zany character (or two).

Director John V. Bellomo's production handles time very well, whisking us wittily from scene to scene using near-identical stagehands Chris and Steven Barber, despite some awkward sets (a Laundromat suggested by three washing machines turned upstage, trapping the action in a corner) on the Playground's thrust stage.

Also worthy of praise is Wardigo's decision to make *The Dos and Don'ts* a four-woman play; part of science fiction's marginalization stems from the mistaken assumption that it's only by, for and about boys.

Most importantly, Bellomo reveals the emotional issues driving these characters (as Firesign Theatre aptly quipped): "forward into the past." Though Wardigo's script eventually abandons Rachel's amusing direct-address treatise, it builds to a fascinating tangle of time-travel problems between the Zoey's and their ties to Rachel and Claire. *The Dos and Don'ts of Time Travel* begins like a play only a science fiction geek could love, but ends as a powerful love story.

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*The Dos and Don'ts of Time Travel* | Through Oct. 19, Straw Flower Productions, Playground at the Adrienne, 2030 Sansom St., 215-551-3376, strawflower.org © Philadelphia City Paper



**IT'S ABOUT TIME:** Rachel (Amanda Schoonover, left) and Zoey (Kate Brennan) get metaphysical in Straw Flower Productions' *The Dos and Don'ts of Time Travel*.

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Posted on Wed, Oct. 8, 2008

## Time traveling, in film and in love

By Toby Zinman  
For The Inquirer

The cuteness of the title of this new play by Nicholas Wardigo sells both the script and Straw Flower's production short. Intriguing and substantial, *The Do's and Don'ts of Time Travel*, now at the Adrienne, is an impressive premiere from a company dedicated to discovering hidden talent.

Rachel (played by Amanda Schoonover) is our guide through time and through the play, a kind of contemporary Proust if Proust were a film fan. Ostensibly, she is a young woman writing a dissertation on movies: "Time travel movies have an intrinsic problem: They all suck."

She roams through decades of movies, from *Somewhere in Time* to *Back to the Future* to the ultimate sucky time travel movie, *The Lake House* ("I can feel myself getting dumber just talking about it").

Is time travel possible? Plausible? Willed? The play flirts with difficult ideas (for examples, both Heracleitus and the Second Law of Thermodynamics are implied but never mentioned) without trusting the audience enough to go the whole intellectual way. But, finally, *Do's and Don'ts* isn't a play just about philosophy or film or science; it's also about love and grief and neediness and memory.

Rachel's friend Zoey (Kate Brennan) is obsessed with James Bond movies, while Claire (Sarah Milici), Zoey's lover, is definitely not. Zoey is also obsessed with Claire. Claire, it will turn out, is dying of an inoperable brain tumor, and the play goes backward and forward in time, between Claire the executive coming home from work, and Claire the desperate, angry woman who has just learned her fate, and Claire helpless in a wheelchair. But that's the least of the time traveling this show has to offer.

Just when we're getting a grip on the characters, a second Zoey (Jen Jaynes) shows up, wearing the same clothes, the same blue wig. The two exist as different temporal versions of the same person, able to meet and trade places somewhere/sometime. And for a time, just to make matters more complicated, the program correctly listed Brennan as Zoey 1 and Jaynes as Zoey 2 while on the Web site (where there are photos), the numbers were reversed. It has since been fixed, but within the context of the play (if not the actors' careers) it made perfect sense.

So it's a shame that both Zoey's are such uninteresting if high-spirited people, while Claire seems grim and humorless all along. The only character we enjoy listening to - although we feel sympathy for them all - is Rachel, who will turn out to have been (is that verb tense right?) far more in control of matters than we think.

John V. Bellomo's direction deals heroically with the nearly impossible stage space and terrible acoustics of the Playground at the Adrienne; it was a stroke of genius to cast actual twins as the guys running the set.

The Do's and Don'ts of Time Travel

Straw Flower Productions at the Playground at the Adrienne, 2030 Sansom St. Through Oct.19. Tickets: \$15-\$20. Information: 215-551-3376 or [www.strawflower.org](http://www.strawflower.org).



MICHAEL PILLA

Kate Brennan (left) and Amanda Schoonover in "The Do's and Don'ts of Time Travel."

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