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Time-traveling to find oneself in Quantum Dragon's 'Do's and Don'ts'

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Kitty Torres (left) and Miranda Reilly in “The Do’s and Don’ts of Time Travel” at Phoenix Theatre in San Francisco.
Photo: Melissa Nigro, Quantum Dragon Theatre

For much of “The Do’s and Don’ts of Time Travel,” you might think those enjoinders and strictures refer to how to make movies about time travel.

“Proposal: Any given time travel movie plot suffers from basic logic problems,” says angsty academic

Rachel (Marisa Darabi) early in Nick Wardigo's rough-cut gem of a play, now in a [Quantum Dragon Theatre](#) West Coast premiere. Where's Christopher Reeve's watch at the end of "Somewhere in Time"? At the end of "Back to the Future," what happens to the version of Marty McFly who grew up sans cool parents?

Rachel studs the show, which opened Friday, Jan. 11, at Phoenix Theatre in San Francisco, with miniature disquisitions that spring from a deep, complicated love-hate relationship with this peculiar cinematic subgenre. They're equal parts snarky and incisive, poetic and provocative (if uncertainly delivered by Darabi, who seemed to be grasping for, then suddenly erupting in, lines on opening night). What if time isn't a line but a plane, she suggests, or not a stream but an ocean?



Miranda Reilly (left) and Marisa Darabi in "The Do's and Don'ts of Time Travel. Photo: Melissa Nigro, Quantum Dragon Theatre

But as the play progresses, its "do's" and "don'ts" expand from "how" to "why," from academic analysis to soulful probing. What if we're drawn to time travel for sad or sick reasons? What if we move backward in time to avoid moving forward? What if the most rewarding time-travel encounter is a loving but honest one with yourself?

Directed by Anna Smith, “Do’s and Don’ts” takes a while to reach this profundity. An opening exchange in a laundromat between Rachel and her friend Zoey (Miranda Reilly, on opening night) tries to make the stakes of whether to machine wash or dry clean last for an entire scene. Apparently, Zoey has never previously looked at her own clothes or used a washing machine. She reads the label of each item as if it’s the first time she’s seen it, then folds each garment before she puts it into the washer.



Miranda Reilly in “The Do’s and Don’ts of Time Travel.” Photo: Melissa Nigro, Quantum Dragon Theatre

Soon, another Zoey (Kitty Torres) barges in, wearing identical cow-print bell bottoms, crop top and color block wig. (Torres and Reilly switch who plays which Zoey with each performance.) It’s not clear how surprised each is to see the other, how aware each is of the rules of what will turn out to be a time-looping universe, why Torres’ Zoey takes a supercilious attitude toward Reilly’s. Throughout these early conversations, the actors seem to be quietly insisting on their own private versions of the play to one another, rather than communing with each other in the moment.

But once the play pieces together Zoey’s girlfriend, Claire (Caitlin Evenson), who’s dying of cancer, stakes sharpen into focus. Zoey’s been reliving, over and over, the last two years of Claire’s life, not because she misses Claire, exactly, but to prove something to herself — about what their relationship meant, about what kind of girlfriend Zoey was, about the kind of adult Zoey is capable of being.



aitlin Evenson (left) and Kitty Torres in “The Do’s and Don’ts of Time Travel” at Phoenix Theatre. Photo: Melissa Nigro, Quantum Dragon Theatre

In these later scenes, the four performers are as understated as a sigh kept inside, a faint smile papering over a wound, an oblique invitation proffered jokingly to conceal its dull ache of need. That naturalism registers all the more keenly in the intimate Phoenix, where you always feel like a crouching eavesdropper rather than a ticketed patron.

That’s the kind of hole in time that “Do’s and Don’ts” bores — no flashing lights around a DeLorean, no gaping maws in the sky. It’s a ruminative journey; all the explosions are inward.

“The Do’s and Don’ts of Time Travel”: Written by Nicholas Wardigo. Directed by Anna Smith.

Through Jan. 26. 85 minutes. \$15-\$50. Phoenix Theatre, 414 Mason St., S.F. www.quantumdragon.org

KQED Arts

Quantum Dragon's 'Do's and Don'ts of Time Travel' Isn't Just for Nerds

Nicole Gluckstern, January 16, 2019



Kitty Torres and Caitlin Evenson during a romantic moment in *The Do's and Don'ts of Time Travel* at Quantum Dragon Theatre. **(Melissa Nigro)**

For a region as tech-friendly as the Bay Area, it's surprising that more theaters don't cater to the computer-age canon.

Indra's Net, in Berkeley, specializes in plays specifically about science and scientists, including Heisenberg, Darwin, and Hawking. Dreams on the Rocks Productions puts on rambunctious reenactments of nerd-camp movie fare such as *Flash Gordon* and *Barbarella*. But only Quantum Dragon Theatre, active since 2016, has fully embraced the dramatic potential of

speculative fiction. Producing work that runs the gamut from space travel to spellcraft to classic science fiction, Quantum Dragon offers audiences a chance to geek out via one of our most classically analog art forms, and have fun doing it.

In their current production—*The Do's and Don'ts of Time Travel*, by Pennsylvania-based playwright Nicholas Wardigo—Quantum Dragon serves up a smart, compelling drama about the personal implications and motivations for time travel. In addition to the play's emotional arc, the audience is treated to one character's thesis on time travel in movies, and why there's always a moment in the plot where logic fails. More than just a clever gimmick to explain away any logical fallacies found within the play, this thesis sparks an opportunity to ruminate on the science behind the fiction, both during the play, and after.



Miranda Reilly as Zoey and Marisa Darabi as Rachel in 'The Do's and Don'ts of Time Travel' at Quantum Dragon Theatre.

Presented by the character Rachel (Marisa Darabi), the thesis breaks time travel into three basic methods: Force of Machination (as found in *Back to the Future*, *The Terminator*, and *Hot Tub Time Machine*), Force of Nature (as in *Army of Darkness* and *Time Bandits*), and Force of Will (*The Time Traveler's Wife*, *Slaughterhouse Five*, and *Donnie Darko*). It's this third method that our lead time traveler, Zoey, avails herself of. Zoey is actually two Zoey's, played by Miranda Reilly and Kitty Torres (who swap their respective roles each night), and

although Rachel points out several times the fallacy of your future self and past self meeting up in time together, they immediately do just that. Circling each other warily in a laundromat, matching ombre-dyed blue wigs framing their watchful faces, Zoey 1 and Zoey 2 are clearly uncomfortable with their encounter, even though—it's intimated—they've done it all before.



Kitty Torres as Zoey and Miranda Reilly as Zoey circle each other in the Laundromat. Kitty Torres as Zoey and Miranda Reilly as Zoey circle each other in the laundromat. (Melissa Nigro)

You see, Zoey's been traveling in time for many years. A "looper," she relives the same two years over and over, trying to change the outcome: the long painful decline of her partner, Claire (Caitlin Evenson). It's the motivation behind her "Force of Will" method of time travel, one which baffles her friend Rachel, both in terms of the relationship and of the chosen loop. But it's this motivation, and the evolution of Zoey's approach, that gives the play its emotional resonance.

That's because at its core, *Do's and Don'ts* is as much about the heart as about the practical how-to's of traveling in time. Set in a world much like our own, except that the play's young lovers still use answering machines, there are no great leaps in perception or deep knowledge of time traveling as leitmotif required of the audience. Being a time traveler is just one of several character traits in Zoey's arsenal, which also include a love of James Bond, a curious inability to sort her own laundry, and an irrepressible free spirit. Her need to relive the same

tragic two years may have the appearance of an unexplainable masochism, but to her, it's the mark of a serious commitment, one that Evenson's Claire doesn't make easy.



Caitlin Evenson as Claire and Kitty Torres as Zoey confront each other in the hospital. *(Melissa Nigro)*

Perfectly contained within the cozy confines of the Phoenix Theatre, a miniature revolving stage (designed by Katie Whitcraft) allows for simple set changes with a minimum of disruption, while the equally effective costuming (by Emily Dwyer) offers a quick visual shorthand to the interior selves of each character. Director Anna Smith's light touch imbues the production with a matter-of-fact realism that makes even the most scientifically improbable moments entirely natural. Without a need for flashy special effects or stagecraft, this understated foray into fantasy feels more down-to-earth and perfectly plausible than any number of "living-room" dramas.

As such, "The Dos and Don'ts of Time Travel" will certainly appeal to a broader spectrum than those who self-identify as nerds. Anyone who recognizes theater's potential for grappling with the bigger questions of our human existence, regardless of genre, will find resonance in this production.

Quantum Dragon Theater in SF hosts your basic time-traveling lesbian love story

By SAM HURWITT, CORRESPONDENT

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Kitty Torres and Miranda Reilly star in “The Do’s and Don’ts of Time Travel.”

Zoey is a time traveler. The catch is that she keeps traveling over the same span of time, the last two years of her girlfriend Claire’s life. What’s going on, and what can — or should — she do about it?

Zoey needs to learn “The Do’s and Don’ts of Time Travel,” which conveniently is the name of the Nicholas Wardigo play that Quantum Dragon Theatre is giving its West Coast premiere at San Francisco’s small Phoenix Theatre.

Billed as a “queer time-travel romance,” the play features two different performers as Zoey, who keeps running into herself along the way. To further complicate matters, actors Kitty Torres and Miranda Reilly will switch roles from night to night as the two Zoey’s.

“I love time travel. As far as sci-fi goes, that’s kind of my sweet spot,” says director Anna Smith. “And so I was really excited that this play offers time travel through the female lens and features queer women in a way that is not exploitive. It’s not a play about being a queer woman. It’s just a play about queer women. It’s written the way that a lot of hetero plays are written about relationships.”

Smith is also executive producer of Shotz SF, a theater company based at San Francisco’s PianoFight that specializes in 10-minute plays written to order on particular themes. Four Shotz company member playwrights have whipped up short sci-fi plays, and one of them plays before the show each night as a curtain warmer.

“Time travel is really tricky,” Smith says, “The play sets up the rules of what the time travel science is, and then it breaks them a whole bunch of times. Nick Wardigo, the playwright, basically lays out how time travel works in like 20-plus time travel movies and he tears into them. You know, ‘Back to the Future’ doesn’t work because of this, and ‘The Lake House’ doesn’t work because of that. But then he uses some of those devices anyway on purpose.”

Quantum Dragon Theatre is a relatively new theater company that has been producing science fiction and fantasy plays in San Francisco since 2016.

Artistic director Sam Tillis, a Pleasanton native now living in Oakland, founded the

company after several years working as an actor in the Bay Area, in order to produce the kind of theater he wanted to see more of.

“It was a reaction to a lot of the plays I had been acting in, which was a lot of Shakespeare and lot of classic sort of things,” Tillis says. “I found that I was able to invite a lot of my theater friends to the work I was doing, but I was never able to invite my nerd friends. All the friends I had in college were computer science, math and gaming people. And I’d be like, come see me in ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore’! You know, all these really great plays that weren’t quite to their interests. And I realized that no one was making the sort of theater that that audience was looking for. They were getting movies, they were getting books, and I wanted to get the science fiction/fantasy fans into the theater.”

Tillis’ goal with QDT is to bring his two worlds together, turning on sci-fi fans to theater and vice versa.

“So if you are a science fiction person and you’ve never seen a play before, check it out,” he says. “If you are a theater person and you don’t think you’re into science fiction, check it out too. My goal is to welcome people from both of those worlds into each other’s world and create a world somewhere in between of science fiction theater that everyone can enjoy.”

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‘THE DO’S AND DON’TS OF TIME TRAVEL’

By Nicholas Wardigo, presented by Quantum Dragon Theatre

Through: Jan. 26

Where: Phoenix Theatre, 414 Mason St., San Francisco

Tickets: \$15-\$50; www.quantumdragon.org