

'Moment' the latest charmer at Merrimack Rep

By KATHLEEN PALMER

Staff Writer

Merrimack Repertory Theatre in Lowell, Mass., has another laugh-out-loud show on their hands with "The Making of a Great Moment" by playwright Peter Sinn Nachtrieb.

The 90-minute, no intermission show has Aysan Celik portraying the idealistic Mona, with Danny Scheie as cynical Terry, who comprise The Victoria Canada Bicycle Theatre Company, a touring troupe of the four-hour opus titled "Great Moments in Human Achievement." The two actors bring the work across America by bicycle, stopping at "backwater, podunk" destinations and less-than-glamorous sites for live theater – including where we meet them, during an equipment failure at a nursing home ("The hole before the hole," Terry intones drolly).

Their show covers the great inventions and discoveries of mankind – from metallurgy, to the wheel, to the discovery of cheese to the act of kissing. Each is acted out with minimal costume props, such as cardboard headpieces that are switched off lightning fast. The running question asked of their audiences is "What can I do? What amazing, inspiring things can a single human being achieve for the good of their species?"

Battling dwindling funds, equipment failures and flagging enthusiasm – Terry says he's done 607 performances in his lifetime, and is ready to call it quits – the actors mirror each setback in their shows; there are analogous tales addressing accidents, necessity as the mother of invention, and how

IF YOU GO

Merrimack Repertory Theatre presents 'The Making of a Great Moment'

WHEN: Through Jan. 29. See website for dates and times.

WHERE: Nancy L. Donohue Theater, 50 E. Merrimack St., Lowell, Mass.

COST: \$15-\$60. Senior, military, group discounts.

TICKETS: 1-978-654-4678, box_office@mrt.org, or online at www.tickets.mrt.org.

INFORMATION: www.mrt.org/show/making-great-moment.

one idea begets the next advancement. "What could you achieve," they ask their audience, "if you're willing to get lost?"

THEATER REVIEW

The beauty of this play-within-a-play is how it allows the real-life actors to give multifaceted performances; and they do. Celik's Mona gives earnest performances for their audiences (with some hilarious accents), and has an emotional "off-stage" arc while she grapples with potentially ad-libbing and dealing with Terry. There is a wonderfully staged slow-motion fall off her bike. Scheie handled a real-life opening-night prop fail with a hilarious, acknowledging silent look to the audience. He is given some great lines and delivers them in perfect bitchy-queen style. When Mona asks him about his personal life, he states "My past is like a refrigerator full of unlabeled Tupperware." When they lament the success of actor acquaintances and the "VICy" theater awards,

Aysan Celik and Danny Scheie star in "The Making of a Great Moment" at Merrimack Repertory Theatre in Lowell, Mass.

Photo courtesy of MEGHAN MOORE

Terry insists "how else can we measure ourselves against the people we dislike the most?"

This last snark is an on-the-mark truism that any actor can surely relate to. Indeed, I wish I'd had a fellow actor with me in the audience that night; I know most will find the humor and living-the-actor-life details very relatable. But my guest that evening found it just as laugh-out-loud funny regardless.

The two unsung heroines of the show are the stage hands who come and go quickly, crisply moving and adjusting the bicycles, which are mounted to allow the actors to pedal without going anywhere. Set design by Apollo Mark Weaver includes the clever use of vertical sleeping bags, which enable Mona and Terry to sleep by the side of the road while still being visible to us as they lie awake and ruminate. Weaver also has beautifully painted scenery rolls and a simple device of the center-lane stripe moving along the road backdrop to simulate their cycling progress.

The production clinched my favor in the very last moment, with the brilliant choice of Canadian prog-rock supergroup Rush's anthem "Limelight," their meditation on living your life on the stage. Come along for the ride that is "The Making of a Great Moment," and remember: duct tape fixes everything.

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