

'Proof' adds up to fascinating drama

*Talented cast, creative set drive
Kopper Bear production*

By JULIE McHALE - TimeOut theater critic

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Kopper Bear Productions is at it again - producing high-quality plays on a poor-man's budget. This time the award-winning play "Proof" by David Auburn is on the boards at Sunset's Studio Theatre. After seeing the play, one can see why it won both the Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award. Combine a fascinating script with four gifted actors, and you have an experience to remember.



Submitted photo

"Proof" runs on weekends through Feb. 19 at Sunset's Studio Theatre. Call 782-4430 for times and tickets.

The story involves Robert, an astute mathematician; his two daughters, Catherine and Claire; and Hal, an adoring student. It is a story of family, of genius, of jealousies, of mental breakdowns, of daunting dreams and disappointments. And even if you have no concept of a theory of prime numbers, it won't diminish your enjoyment of this creative work. As part of the humor in the play, there are some interesting observations about nerdy math types, but most of the stereotypes dissolve as the story proceeds.

The play begins with a scene between Catherine and her father, Robert, who is really dead when the story starts. It is Catherine's 25th birthday and she imagines enjoying it over a bottle of champagne with her beloved dad.

Catherine cherishes her father, a genius mathematician, and chooses to care for him for seven years after he suffers a mental breakdown. When he begins to function again, she returns to her

college studies only to return when he relapses. Catherine has inherited her father's propensity for math, but she sometimes worries that she may also be inclined toward depression.

Two other characters arrive upon the scene: Catherine's sister, Claire, who lives in New York as a successful career woman; and Hal, one of Robert's admiring graduate students. There is a lot of bad history between the siblings, and Catherine is very possessive of her father's work and questions Hal's motives as he mulls over her father's notebooks, so we find her quite brittle on the morning after her father's death on both counts.

Hal grows quite fond of Catherine, especially after he discovers her talent in math, and she eventually entrusts him with the key that leads to an even greater discovery - a very revealing notebook. Meanwhile, the relationship between Catherine and Claire continues to sizzle as their true feelings about each other surface. Claire's desire to control her younger sister is thinly hidden beneath a veneer of caring.

An extremely talented cast held us in thrall throughout. Paul Troglia portrays Robert with depth and intensity. Occasionally, his acting is too histrionic for the dictates of a small stage, but he warrants our sympathy and credulity. Kassi Mattera beautifully captures the complexity of Catherine, and Carrie McGhee deserves commendation for giving Claire three dimensions. She could easily have been played as the officious, snobby older sister, whom we hated, period.

But Matthew Huebsch as Hal gets my vote for best performance amidst very stiff competition. His reactive face was fascinating to watch, his sincerity was disarming, his exuberance was compelling. I'll be watching for his next role wherever that may be.

The set design by Howard Bashinski was very evocative of atrophy, one of the themes of the play. He deserves commendation for his creativity in that regard as well as his skilled direction. This professional production deserves to be seen. Check it out. You will not regret it. The play runs on weekends through Feb. 19. Call 782-4430 for times and tickets.