

THEATER REVIEW

'Still Life in Color' a stylized fairy tale

By Michael Phillips

Tribune theater critic

From a provocative version of "Alice in Wonderland" to a drolly Continental "Rules for Good Manners in the Modern World," each show I've seen by The Utopian Theatre Asylum (T.U.T.A.) has taken me someplace strange. The company favors plays others avoid like the plague. How often does Pushkin's "Mozart and Salieri" get an airing? Even if you resist the material you know you're in the hands of real talent.

If Chicago were a different sort of theater city — more internationally curious and adventurous — a director such as T.U.T.A. artistic head Zeljko Djukich would be having his way with the classics at the city's big non-profit resident theaters. As is, he manages plenty on his own and on a low budget, creating three-dimensional landscapes that distill an essence of a text, or an idea within it. He's not conceptually timid, which puts him at odds with most of his colleagues.

"Still Life in Color" is the company's first piece by a Chi-



Photo by Andy Rothenberg

Jacqueline Stone (from left), Jeremy Glickstein and Alice Wedoff in "Still Life in Color," by Chicago playwright Philip Dawkins.

cago writer, Philip Dawkins, whose "Day After Yesterday" served as the first draft of this heavily stylized 2003 fairy tale. It is told in hybrid form: one-third Kabuki, one-third Noh and one-third everything else.

Long ago, "before a machine could apologize for being out of cash," there lived a boy, a girl and a "distraction." For nine years a village has been cursed with ceaseless rain. Boy and girl fall in love at first sight, a state described by playwright Daw-

kins as "the belief that two people will disprove Newton's laws of physics by occupying the same space for all time."

The romantic triangle of "Still Life in Color" is traced by an Old Man, who narrates and takes part in the story. Dawkins' play, 90 minutes in length, sags under the weight of its own ultra-arch poetics in the middle portion. For every pungent turn of phrase — the scene wherein boy and girl meet is wonderful — Dawkins overburdens his

"A Still Life in Color"

When: Through Jan. 18

Where: T.U.T.A. at Chicago Dramatists, 1105 W. Chicago Ave.

Running time: 1 hour, 30 minutes

Tickets: \$12-\$20 at 847-217-0691

metaphors and similes. He is, however, a writer with talent.

Jeremy Glickstein fares best in locating a performance style that works in the context of a polyglot text. He and Alice Wedoff pair up with felicitous rightness as the boy and the girl. Jacqueline Stone as the curse-lifting distraction has her moments, though she tends toward shrillness. The stage dressed by scenic designer Martin Andrew is done up in Kabuki clean lines and right angles.

The play's whimsy and bitters won't be for all tastes. Neither is Djukich's direction, which has a way of lulling you into a dreamy contemplative state that requires a bit of patience. Then again, T.U.T.A. isn't trying to appeal to all tastes. What's the point of that?

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