

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

Misfits and Hidden Gifts

'A Wrinkle in Time' invites self-acceptance and discovery

BY DARLEEN ORTEGA

I went to see the new production of "A Wrinkle In Time" at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival mostly because I see all the OSF productions. I vaguely remembered that the book on which it is based meant a lot to me as a young person, but recalled nothing about why. As it turned out, my murky recollection - aided by some smart choices by director and adaptor Tracy Young, the production's talented designers, and a cast who clearly loves the source material -- all added up to an unexpectedly profound experience for me.

The story, for the uninitiated and the forgetful, involves an awkward



Alejandra Escalante stars as Meg Murry in the Oregon Shakespeare Festival production of "A Wrinkle in Time."

OPINIONATED JUDGE

BY JUDGE DARLEEN ORTEGA



corniness and camp.

But this cannily-designed production manages to strike all the right notes. The book was written in 1962, and the set design incorporates lots of signals of 1960s America, with its relative innocence mixed with paranoia. The design has a sort of handmade feel which suits that time and also the book's demand on imagination; it also captures the sense of a book that was once beloved by now older adults who are sharing it with present-day children and grandchildren. All the child characters are played (quite effectively) by adults, but one child actor appears often on stage, reading or working on her own science experiments. Her presence on stage captures a sense of a mixture of generations who have responded profoundly to this material.

When done well, a minimalist approach to special effects can serve to bring the profundities of a story into bold relief. Somehow the actors seem more vulnerable, awakening audiences to the poignancy of the story. And so it is here; the innocence of Meg and Charles Wallace and Calvin convinces, underlined by various members of the cast frequently reciting lines from the beloved book. The production moves between various levels of realism and stagecraft in a manner that parallels the time-travel of the story, inviting the audience to travel through worlds of imagination and meaning.

Best of all, because I had not recalled much beyond that this particular book had meant much to me as a child, the production set me on a search for what had appealed to me then. The obvious answer -- and the one reached for by so many critics -- is that the story makes a hero of an awkward adolescent, and sets her on a voyage of self-acceptance and discovery of her hidden gifts. That is, of course, true. I in-

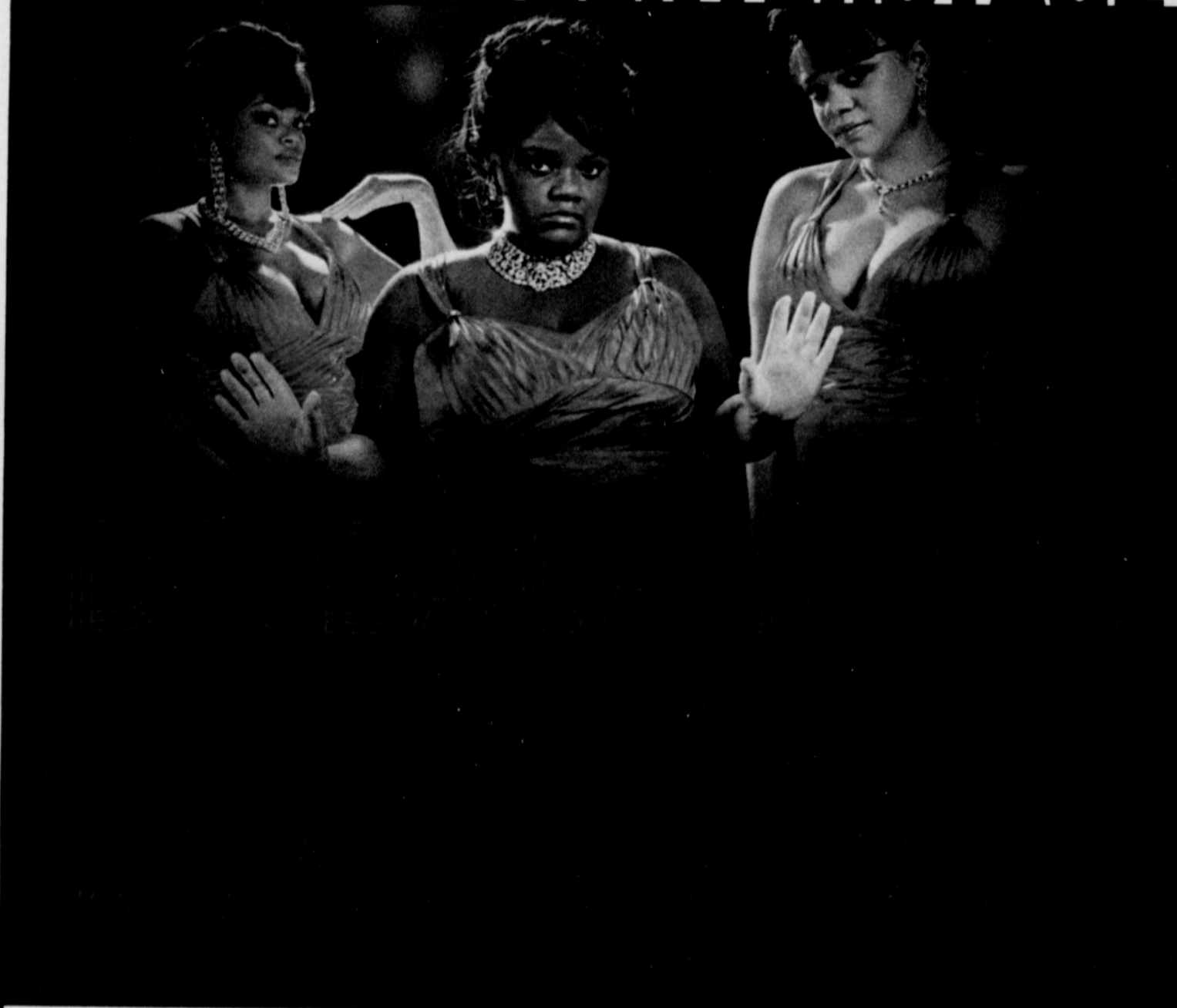
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adolescent girl, Meg Murry, who is a social misfit and unsuccessful student. Her beloved father, a physicist who had been employed at some top-secret government project, has been missing for more than a year. She and her genius five-year-old brother, Charles Wallace, receive a nighttime visit from a mysterious old woman, Mrs. Whatsit, who tells them and their mother that there are such things as "tesseract," or wrinkles in time and space that one can travel through. The following day the two children and Meg's schoolmate, Calvin, end up "tessering" -- traveling through such wrinkles -- to combat an evil Black Thing that is threatening the universe, and hoping to find Meg's father.

It's a complex story to depict on stage. The world of the book contains lots of fanciful elements and twists of the rules of time and space that can be difficult to describe, let alone stage. These are not so much problems for a book, whose literary life depends on the imagination of the reader, but bringing the story to life on stage is full of potential for

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