

Two in the Aisle

Point A to Point B at Arts on the Horizon

BY PATRICK LORD



The objective is simple: get the ball from one location to the next.

The catch: the ball may never travel the same way twice.

The solution: transform the common objects of your laboratory into vehicles powered by imagination and explore movement and rhythm in a musical duet of comedy.

That is, after all, just good science.

Point A to Point B, like all good theatre, leaves audiences, young and old, in a place that is different from where they began.

(L-R) Ryan Sellers and Natalie Cutcher in *Point A to Point B* by David Kilpatrick. Arts on the Horizon. Alexandria, VA. Photo by Aram Varitan.

Patrick Lord is a freelance projection and scenic designer and member of TYA/USA, based out of Washington, D.C., who specializes in and researches design as it relates to Theatre for Young Audiences.

Though it may seem easy to move a ball from start to finish, Arts on the Horizon's production of David Kilpatrick's *Point A to Point B* is anything but simple. Within the span of thirty minutes, audiences meet two distinct personalities and watch from the outside as the characters transform their environment and themselves – all without uttering a word. Arts on the Horizon exclusively produces theatre for very young audiences, ranging from ages 0–6. This production clearly reflects the company's mission, developed under the guidance of Artistic Director and Founder, Michelle Kozlak, which states that they "have the utmost respect for children and want what may be their first theatrical performance to entertain them, challenge them, spark creativity and enhance the imaginative play in which many children this age engage."

Upon entering the theatre, young audiences find their seats on a floor mat only a few feet from the stage. The stage itself is a combination of a classroom and laboratory, all painted with bright blues and silvers and filled with mysterious boxes and a large assortment of props, such as a large banner with blank squares that would later be drawn on to record the different methods used to move the various balls. In *Point A to Point B*, the actors tap into creativity and wonder the same way that children do – by recognizing the potential in the objects around them. The way that Director Megan Alrutz uses the space makes the mundane magical: a tennis shoe transforms into a sailboat as actors don pirate hats and guide the boat with their hands through the rocky currents of their own design. The brilliance of this not only embodies exploration and play, but also exemplifies how far a creative perspective can elevate a performance.

One particularly impressive feat of this production lies in its ability to establish a world and premise without the use of spoken narrative. It is only through movement and musical scoring, provided by Shanta Parasuraman, that the performers are able to share their story. The Scientist, a straight laced and orderly character portrayed by Natalie Cutcher, begins by competing with The Catcher, a messy goofball played by Ryan Sellers. As the two converse through movement and music they learn to grow and work together as they transition from rivals to friends. The music of the performance brilliantly conveys the rules of the story. If the ball successfully moved from start to finish, they would hear a unique sound, whereas if they repeated their actions, a different tone told them they did something incorrectly, eventually teaching them their task.

The show allows young audiences to lose themselves in the world of imaginary play, as the production expertly demonstrates when a magical box with a musical crank produces different balls and needs no clarification or origin story. An older audience may expect rules and a reason for why a Scientist and Catcher find themselves in a blue-silver class-lab, but this young audience seemed to accept it immediately.

The joy of this production lies in how all the elements combine to create genuinely fun and surprising repetition of a simple task that is at the heart of games and play. By the end, the characters have used the space around them to move the ball eight times with various vehicles, from a toy car with custom built roads to a hot air balloon made from a baseball glove and party balloon. The Scientist and Catcher are not only more inventive but are more generous with one another, which allows them to have even more fun. Finally, after watching the characters play and imagine on stage, the audience seated on the floor is showered in bubbles, filling the space with gently floating, shimmering balls serving as an appropriate celebration.

Point A to Point B, like all good theatre, leaves audiences, young and old, in a place that is different from where they began. As a designer for the theatre, I have spent a career studying and investigating ways to innovate visual storytelling. This production serves as a humble reminder that sometimes the most innovative choice is the simplest, especially when you trust your audience's imagination. ■