



Pictured left to right: Rohan Link-Francisco, Manali Sunkara, and Sam Hook. Photo by Josh Bernaski.

Review: *A Wrinkle in Time* at Lifeline Theatre—The Lasting Legacy of a Powerful Story

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Being a lifelong fan of *A Wrinkle in Time*, the 1962 book by Madeleine L'Engle, is not unusual.

It's a must-read for elementary-school-aged kids, as much fun in the classroom as it is

reading at home under the covers. This time of year is perfect for a cozy afternoon or

evening at the theater, moving from gentle rain outside into the world of this story, which begins with an eerie thunderstorm that brings unexpected visitors to Meg Murry's home.



Lifeline Theatre has a unique history with the story—ensemble member James Sie adapted the book into a play in 1989, with the author's apparent blessing. Audience members can browse memorabilia in the theater's lobby from L'Engle's visit to Lifeline, including photos with the cast and Sie, as well as an autographed copy of the book signed for the original Meg, Sandy Snyder: it reads, "From Meg to Meg." The next production came in 2017, and visitors can compare the costumes and set styling to the show they see today, directed by Heather Currie.

The narrative is loyal to the book: Meg (played by Manali Sunkara) is experiencing trouble at school, feeling like an "oddball" and missing her father, a scientist who disappeared under mysterious circumstances a year ago. Her prodigious younger brother, Charles Wallace (played by Rohan Link Francisco), also gets bullied at school because he chooses to keep his genius to himself, listening more than he speaks. When we meet the Murry family, we see two kids and a mom still reeling from the loss of their father. But Charles Wallace has tapped into otherworldly forces in the form of the "metaphysical" and eccentric Mrs. Whatsit (played by Amanda Link), leading the siblings, along with Meg's schoolmate Calvin O'Keefe (played by Sam Hook), on an intergalactic rescue mission to find Meg's father.

Manali Sunkara (Meg) has a great storybook quality to her performance, while Rohan Link Francisco (Charles Wallace) brings a super impressive presence and mastery of his craft for someone so young. Seriously, the number of speeches and difficult lines this kid delivers is mind-blowing, exactly like Mr. Charles Wallace is meant to be. Sam Hook (Calvin O'Keefe) keeps the action moving as a steady supporting character, and the three witch-like entities helping our heroes on their journey occupy several roles throughout the play: Amanda Link (Mrs. Whatsit) is one of the show's main narrative forces and an excellent guiding light; Cami Stuckert (Mrs. Who) has an incredible grasp of different languages and strong line delivery of the quotes her character speaks in; and Jordan Gleaves (Mrs. Which) has a powerful presence in every scene he enters.

The themes throughout the book, and therefore the play, include the bravery it takes to remain an individual and society's compulsion toward conformity. When the kids reach the dark planet Kamazotz, all the children there are made of cardboard, and the zombie-like suburbs haven't seen an "aberration" in years. When the kids are threatened by It, the big bad force of this planet, they have to fight to stand strong against the hive mind. But we can easily see the value of each child's individual gifts: Charles Wallace is observant to the point of mind reading, Calvin uses intuition to guide his path, and Meg thinks differently than the people around her.

This adaptation by ensemble member James Sie does a wonderful job featuring lines directly from the book with great impact. The stage is bare, with only a set of stairs and an alien-looking arc and colorful curtain that change shape throughout the show as the kids travel. Mrs. Whatsit's costume is a definite highlight, with static-clung clothing creating a busy hoop skirt and the perfect overwhelmed-yet-world-wise effect. Jazmin Aurora Medina's costuming is excellent throughout, with the clumpy sheet monsters (Aunt Beast) equally creepy and comforting (truly like a giant comforter).

The show itself feels like hot cocoa with marshmallows enjoyed on a stormy fall night. It captures the fear you felt as a kid when thunder approached, and you weren't sure your home was sturdy enough to stay standing. Director Heather Currie shared about the story, "This book was formative for me. It has always been a safe place that encouraged me to be myself and know that there was love all around me. What a privilege to get to explore this story on stage." This show is equally suited for kids who might also be having bad days at school, or for grown-ups who need a loving dose of childhood nostalgia.

Additional credits: Lindsay Mummert (scenic designer), Sam Lancaster (props designer), Sarah Riffle (lighting designer), Joe Griffin (sound designer), Saskia Bakker (puppet designer), Felicia Niebel (choreographer), Rebecca Dose (stage manager), Harrison Ornelas (technical director).

A Wrinkle in Time is running through Oct. 18 and is recommended for audience members 7 and older. You can purchase tickets [online](#) or at the Lifeline Theatre box office. The theater is located at 6912 N Glenwood Ave in Rogers Park. Running time is two hours.

For more information on this and other productions, see [theatreinchicago.com](#).

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