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A play not to miss: Town Hall Theatre's 'A Christmas Story'

By Sharon K. Sobotta



Photo provided

advice," Sofia says. "It's fun."

Sofia moved to Lafayette with her family from Mexico nearly six years ago without any English under her belt. Her mother, Paulina Lares, is in complete awe of how far her daughter Sofia (and her older sister) have come since then.

"Seeing her doing challenging things in a language that's not her first, that she couldn't speak six years ago is amazing and it makes me feel so proud," Lares says.

As the mother of two daughters, Lares is passionate about empowering girls and uses jewelry as the vehicle to spread affirming messages. While Lares 's daughter isn't able to wear the jewelry on stage while playing the part of a 6-year-old boy, she hopes that the messages that are usually around her daughter's wrist have penetrated within.

"She's got bracelets that say to be confident, be strong, be kind and to remind her that God loves her. The idea of it is that when things get difficult, you can look at your wrist and say `hey, everything's going to be OK,'" Lares says. "Being here at THT has been great for Sofia's confidence. She's loved acting with adults and she's committed."

Alejandro Garcia, Sofia's father, remembers being hopeful but nervous when she was invited to audition after appearing in the Lafayette Elementary School's collaborative production of Xanadu last spring. "It turned out well. She made it and she was so happy about getting the part, which makes me very happy," Garcia says. "I can tell she's invested because even though the rehearsals are long and sometimes hard for her, she does it happily. That's how we can tell she's committed."

Sofia Garcia is but one member of the talented cast(s) of the show which include David Boyll, Gretchen Lee Salter, David Ghilardi, Janelle Aguirre and understudies Mark Foster and Carla Birkhofer and two rotating casts of children.

Those willing to trade in or add to the at-home couch viewing of the Christmas classic by attending the Town Hall Theatre live production, directed by Heather Cousins with assistance from Lisa Morrison, will likely have a hard time returning to their television sets.

The signature scenes and props - the tacky leg prize lamp, the soap in the mouth, the tongue on the pole, the leg of the apathetic Santa kicking Ralphie down the slide for wanting a present that could shoot his eye out as the narrator, telling the story through Ralphie's lens are performed with such precision, animation, care and color that they arguably outshine the television-version. Add on to that carefully crafted props and costumes mimicking the kitchens, classrooms, appliances, and clothing from the era of time, along with actors that make each of the characters come fully to life and you've got a play that promises to keep you on the edge of your seat.

The play itself is around two hours, and longer when you factor in intermission, but it is worth every minute of it. If you find yourself wondering whether or not it's appropriate for the whole family or whether young children can sit through it, the answer is unequivocally "Yes." (This reporter tested it out by bringing my two children, who easily complain of tiredness or boredom. Both of them loved the play so much, they wanted to

Like the character Randy from "A Christmas Story," 11-year-old Sofia Garcia, who plays him in the Town Hall Theatre's green cast, is the youngest child. And Sofia and her character Randy have similar feelings about oatmeal. "I like oatmeal and he likes oatmeal, but not that much," Sofia playfully explains.

Like the classic television movie that plays non-stop for 24 hours on TBS and TNT on the hours that bridge Christmas Eve to Christmas Day, the play that is now at the Town Hall Theatre opens up with a highly stressed mother loudly calling Ralphie to the table to join Randy who uses his oatmeal as playdough until he's challenged to pretend he's a piggy eating from a trough. Sofia Garcia says she's had fun rising to the challenge of being a messy little brother in the Town Hall Theatre's production of "A Christmas Story," while working with people from all ages. "Everyone is nice. They give me

wait to meet the cast and are actively trying to plan another viewing of the play.) The remaining shows are on Dec. 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16 and 17. For tickets, visit www.townhalltheatre.com/christmas-story

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