



Into the Blue

We love this children's fairy tale with grown-up themes

By JIM SLOTEK -- Toronto Sun

Recent events couldn't have created better audience prep for Blue Planet, Icelandic playwright Andri Snaer Magnason's sprightly ET allegory.

The play made its English-language debut at the Lorraine Kimsa Theatre For Young People on Thursday.

Virtually every child in the audience has fundraised for Third World tsunami victims. Yet the Third World was there before, and Blue Planet suggests to children a situation where one group's comfort comes at cost to another's. And it asks how much they'd really be willing to give up to set things right.

The titular Blue Planet is a paradise inhabited only by children, because "all children have a well in their hearts that is full of youth, and on the Blue Planet that well had never run dry.."

They chase around, watch butterflies, collect precious stones, hunt seals and barbecue batwings (okay, maybe it's not a paradise for the seals and bats). The upshot is the children know only joy and friendship. It's like the ultimate Montessori School.

That is, until an alien named Jolly Goodday (Kevin Bundy) lands and offers the children something new, the ability to fly -- which is accomplished by sprinkling them with the dust off butterflies' wings. The cost to the butterflies is that they lose their own ability to fly. The cost to the children -- as with everything else the snake-oily Goodday sells them -- is "a tiny bit of your youth, less than 1%, just a sip from a glass."

Their youth turns out to be capital spent in increments. Some goes to pay for a Teflon coating that allows the children to never bathe again. And the flying (deftly handled by two hand-operated, levered cranes) turns out to be limited to daytime hours, and the children, who are now easily bored after being exposed to the thrill of flight (cough -- video games -- cough), come to detest the night. So at a cost of even more youth, Goodday nails the Sun to its spot in the sky, so it's always noon over the children's island.

The ultimate cost of all this is discovered by Brimir (Paul Dunn) and Hulda (Audrey Dwyer), as they get lost while racing (competition is another side-effect of Goodday's consumerism, and for the first time the children begin to hate one another).

Blown off course to the other side of the planet, they find children who are miserable in the dark. Afraid of retribution, Brimir and Hulda lie and say their own island is even darker. Back home, they face having to tell the others what their new thrill ride has caused -- an experience pretty similar to convincing neo-conservatives that global warming is actually happening.

Magnason's text makes much sport of this, with the at-first skeptical children eventually conceding they caused the darkness, but voting to keep the Sun anyway and send the dark-children "blankets, food and shoes." ("The majority is always right!" Goodday pronounces gleefully).

The set is terrifically lush and paradisaical, and Blue Planet's twentysomething cast seems to revel in the task of free-spiritedness -- particularly protagonists Dunn and Dwyer, though she fails to power-down well in the scenes where the children lose their youth entirely. Bundy is smarm incarnate as Goodday, but a little pat in his ultimate redemption.

There's a happy ending, natch -- the kind you'd expect of a writer from a country where most adults believe in fairies. It may make National Post editorial writers pull out what's left of their hair, but heck it's for kids. Let go and buy the world a Coke.