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Review: Constellations | Dallas Theater Center |
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Made of Stars

Dallas Theater Center opens its season with Nick Payne's *Constellations*, which beautifully traces a relationship with a multitude of what ifs.

by [David Novinski](#)
 published Friday, September 2, 2016

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Photo: Karen Almond

Allison Pistorius and Alex Organ
in *Constellations* at Dallas Theater Center

Dallas — For anyone who has ever wished for a do-over in his or her dating destiny, **Dallas Theater Center** serves up an intimate flight of fantasy based on factual physics. Well, theoretical physics, really. In ***Constellations***, playwright Nick Payne makes the well-trod boy-meets-girl territory fresh by tracing through it repeatedly, albeit with small changes. If, according to string theory, all outcomes of a moment exist in parallel universes, then there exists one where the guy gets the girl.

Of course, the opposite must also be true.

Allison Pistorius plays Marianne, the beautiful Cambridge University professor, and Alex Organ plays Roland, the charming beekeeper. From their first awkward meeting, this seems like a familiar British romantic comedy and these two actors know how to work it. Pistorius' Marianne is noble whichever avenue the plot goes down



Photo: Karen Almond

Allison Pistorius and Alex Organ



and Organ keeps pace with her in earnest affability. The audience so approved of the duo they would have resorted to cheering or booing to influence the outcome if given the slightest encouragement. It's a credit to the restraint of the actors and the precision of the direction that Payne's play survives the charisma of the cast.

Under Wendy Dann's careful direction, the tension between the possible outcomes keeps us alert. The audience watches the action and each other in the arena configuration of the studio space of the Wyly, part jury examining the snippets of scenes for any diversion from the previous iteration and part proud parents spying on the young couple on the front porch. As the circumstances take on greater stakes, we long for the best as much for ourselves as for the couple.

The play is graced with Ryan Rumery's incredible original music/sound design that sometimes floats in like ambient haze or hangs thick and heavy like a high-pressure heartbeat. This is the only sound design that can take credit for a section of silence. Equally as precise are Steve Teneyck's romantic lights and glossy dais set with opposing spiral ramps that reinforce the dialectic of the evening, the attraction drawing things into a spiral and the momentum pulling them apart. Meanwhile glowing colored globes hover above invoking the celestial context of the goings on. Even costume designer Melissa Panzarelo weighs in on the astral with a beautiful scarf tie-dyed with a wink toward aurora.

It's all about scale.

A constellation, after all, refers to the name that we've given to stars in the sky. Points of light vast distances away from each other that we've presumptuously gathered into shapes referencing animals or heroes in our



habitual attempt to ascribe meaning to the seeming randomness of the universe. These shapes would not look the same in any place else in space and considering that they're all moving, any time else, either.

In other words, we're tied to the here and now. As much as the cosmic scale can make us feel insignificant or the quantum scale can suggest that time doesn't matter, it's what unites us in our humanity. Payne reminds us of the delicate, precious nature of that gift.

A gift best shared. **TJ**



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