

Revolutionary Coming-of-Age In Wisconsin

"Pinkolandia" runs a tad long and talks a little too much and could use a slightly sharper plot. Yet I'm not sure how much I'd change about this ambitious and often beautiful new play.

With a script by Andrea Thome that's both dreamlike and dramatic, "Pinkolandia," set in the early 1980s, tells the story of a family of Chilean exiles that has relocated to Wisconsin. The

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tale focuses on Beny, 12, and Gaby, 8, who, like most kids, are struggling to find a place in the world.

Tio Ignacio, a former revolutionary, visits the family, filling the girls' heads with lore about heroism and their homeland. It gives nothing away to say that problems soon arise — coming of age is never easy, especially for two schoolgirls who stand out from the crowd.

From a talking bear that appears to Gaby as she hides in her closet, to shadowy Nazis who haunt Beny's daydreams, the action frequently veers to-

Pinkolandia

Intar Theater

ward the fantastical. That's not always an easy sell to audiences, but over all the payoffs are abundant here; the excitements and confusions of youth are palpable. Two scenes in particular — one in which Beny stages a classroom protest, the other a fight between the sisters — are superb.

Maria Helan, as Beny, and Heather Velazquez, as Gaby, are impressive. These adult actresses inhabit their young characters marvelously. Annie Henk and Carlo Albán, as their parents, are equally accomplished, while José Antonio Melián and Gabriel Sloyer round out the expert cast, directed by José Zayas. Raul Abrego's set and Alex Koch's video projections creatively open up the tiny space at the Intar Theater.

"Pinkolandia" explores a lot of ideas — the loss of innocence, politics, the hardships of immigrants — with passion. At just over two hours, the script can occasionally feel ragged. A bit of trimming could make it cleaner, of course. But then there's the danger that smoothing those edges might remove its rough magic.

"Pinkolandia" continues through May 26 at the Intar Theater, 500 West 52nd Street, fourth floor, Clinton; (212) 695-6134, intartheatre.org.
