

The Sun Star

Tumyaraq-qaa: An Indigenous Odyssey



"Tumyaraq-qaa" by Theatre UAF, written and directed by Kavelina Torres. Featuring (left-right) Sean Asikluk Topkok, Donetta Tritt, Misty "Too Oozhrii" Nickoli, Kyle Moore, David Leslie, Debbie Mekiana and writer/director Kavelina Torres in front. Photo by Kade Mendelowitz, UAF Theatre and Film.

From Friday, March 31st to Sunday, April 2nd, Tunyaraq-qaa premiered for three days of fully reserved shows. The viewers of this production had the opportunity to peek behind the scenes of a television pilot by playing the role of live studio audience.

Tumyaraq-qaa is written and directed by Kavelina Torres. In their Director's Notes, they describe the production in their own words as "an indigenous futurisms situation comedy that explores the link between land and Peoples. It signals that we (Indigenous Peoples) are here in the past, the present, and the future". The production team is proud to note that they embedded seven Indigenous languages into the script. Kavelina Torres goes on to explain the fundamental questions of the work, writing, "Tumyaraq-qaa asks the question: 'Is this the trail?' And in a more meta way: 'Is this the way?'...as we question our lives, if we are following the right trail, and our time spent on earth, I hope we can come together and laugh for this bit".

Tumyaraq-qaa follows an indigenous bridge crew of a futuristic ship preparing to venture into the outer reaches of space. Before their departure, they have to deal with the General, played by Jaden Daniel Reed, along with various world leaders, and the Tax Drone, played by Charlotte Gray, all of whom interact with the actors on stage from a screen projected above the set. The crew also awaits a crucial piece of technology, which is being retrieved back on earth by the Chief Engineer, Tekitua, played by Canaan Chanar. To retrieve the tech, Tekitua must beat the clock and thwart the "Squad", resulting in some action packed scenes, which were also filmed before the live performances.

On the ship, Captain Ellalluk, played by Misty "Too Oozhrii" Nickoli, grapples with her leadership role. The Captain can frequently be seen practicing speeches that she hopes will inspire her crew. Equipped with her stepping stool and a great team supporting her, Ellalluk is able to overcome self-doubt and lead her crew into the outer reaches. Nickoli is

captivating in her portrayal of the Captain's wavering self-confidence, and later her strength in owning her role as a leader.

Acting alongside the Captain is Kyle Moore as Atauciiq, the First Mate who accepts the title of Number Two given to him by the Captain, but strives for the title of Number One (which he deems more appropriate). Where the Captain is easygoing, the First Mate is strict, however above all he is loyal to the Captain and the mission of the ship. Moore perfects a soldierly stoicism amidst any and all antics that ensue onboard the Tumyaraq-qaa.

The crew is also supported by Suupaaq, the Spiritual Advisor, played by David Leslie. Suupqu acts as an anchor for Ellalluk, always reminding her of where they've come from and where they are headed, while also keeping things lighthearted. Their spouse, Dr. Yuungcarista, played by Debbie Mekiana, is the doctor onboard who everyone would rather avoid being treated by, because she goes a little overboard with her treatments. Donetta "Ditter" Tritt plays 'Naaq, the ship's navigator who also happens to be a math whiz. She works alongside Kaaktuna, the Communications Officer, played by Sean Asikluk Topkck, who is at the ready with jokes and flirty banter.

This show is a delight for the senses- the set design and costumes combine artistry and sci-fi futurism. The use of the screen above the set allows the audience to be transported back to earth, to view video calls with the world leaders, and to witness some spectacular animation, which depicts the earth and the ship in space with a one-of-a-kind vision. Sound Design works to make all of these visual elements come alive.

Director Kavelina Torres shared some fun facts about the real science portrayed in the Tumyaraq-qaa pilot. They relate, "there really is a star IID 40307, 42 light years toward Pictor. CAW drive is named after the three scientists: Casimir, Alcubierre, and White who researched gravity well technology. All of the constellations and star lore was found through the research of Chris M. Cannon and John MacDonald and exist within the cultures of Inupiaq, Yup'ik, Inuit (Igloodik, Nunavut, Canada), Upper Tanana and Gwich'in."

Congratulations to the dedicated team of artists, producers, and performers who put together an amazing show. Visit this article on our website, uafsunstar.com, to view the online playbill for the show, which includes the full Director's Notes, a full cast and crew list, detailed actor bios, a link to donate to the UAF Department of Theatre and Film, and more.

