

Review: Revenge of the Space Pandas" @ Bridge Street Theatre, 7/13/18

By [Steve Barnes](#)



Photo: Alon Koppel

Some of the cast of "The Revenge of the Space Pandas" at Bridge Street Theatre.

Catskill

In 1977, soon after "American Buffalo," David Mamet's foul-mouthed masterpiece about smalltime crooks, closed on Broadway, another play by the then-29-year-old Mamet opened far off-Broadway, in Flushing, Queens. Its full title: "Revenge of the Space Pandas, or Binky Rudich and the Two-Speed Clock."

Most theater fans know "American Buffalo." "Space Pandas"? Not so much. Even given that it's a play for young audiences, "Space Pandas" is an oddity in the Mamet oeuvre, a whimsical, short sci-fi comedy about the brainy boy of the subtitle, who invents a timekeeping device, also mentioned in the subtitle, that lands him and two pals on a planet populated largely by the galactic ursines of the main title.

Whether this justifies a trip to Catskill to the eclectic Bridge Street Theatre to see a new production depends on a few things, starting with one's ability to appreciate a theater company's community outreach in staging a play with a large cast of local kids and teens.

Playing an actor who once was a celebrity but has long suffered from hard times, Bridge Street cofounder Steven Patterson, a professional actor for about 40 years, finds exactly the right tone, perhaps unsurprising given that he also directed the production. Patterson hams it up hilariously, inspiring some of his younger castmates to better performances than they'd previously been giving. Much of the acting in smaller roles is gestural and from the neck down, involving shoulder shrugs and waving of hands, while line delivery tends toward the rushed and/or monotone.

As the title character, Wil Anderson has the right cool-geek persona. He seems like a true young scientist, the sort who might zap himself and buddies into space one weekend and accidentally blow the roof off his parents' home the next, likely reacting to both with the same delight. Amara Wilson shows natural comedic talent in need of further development as Binky's pal Bob the Sheep (I was sure it would be spelled Baab), David Smilow is amusingly mercurial as the feckless ruler of the space-panda planet, whose punishment of choice is dropping an enormous pumpkin onto the heads of the doomed, and Phillip Levine pokes fun at television reporters with his character's news updates on the case of the visitors from Earth and their attempt to return home. Special kudos to Natalie Parker for her deadpan turn as the ukulele-strumming court jester. (Parker also wrote the jester's songs.)

Rodney Alan Greenblatt did an excellent job with the graphic design and off-kilter set, which can be speedily moved to change scenes and works remarkably well on the small Bridge Street stage, crowded as it is at times with a cast of 16. Jennifer Anderson's splendid costumes are even better.

Exuberantly performed and obviously a pleasure for the hometown audience, "Space Pandas" is a small, imperfect show chosen and staged with the right intentions and a generous spirit. There's a place for theater like that.

sbarnes@timesunion.com • 518-454-5489 • blog.timesunion.com/tablehopping • @Tablehopping • [facebook.com/SteveBarnesFoodCritic](https://www.facebook.com/SteveBarnesFoodCritic)