

REVIEW OF THE HEADLIGHT CHILDREN by Ryley Redal
6-1-2023 CWU Introduction to Theatre

Throughout the course of this quarter, we were asked to attend a live theatre production in our area and write about our experience. A couple of weeks ago, a friend of mine named Jampa Dorje invited me to an event called The Big Read which was hosted outside the front entrance to the Ellensburg City Library. The event was inspired by a book of poems called *Catalog of Unpublished Gratitude* written by a poet by the name of Ross Gay. When I arrived at the scene there was a free print-making table, where people could make tote bags with quotes printed on the side accompanied by band members setting up to perform. Jampa is part of a local band called The Headlight Children, made up of four people from around the community. During their performances, Stephen and Leo Robison, father and son, improvise on their guitars while Catherine Camarata (aka Kama) choreographs a dance with her hula hoops. About halfway, Jampa comes in and begins reciting a poem. I was asked if I could film the production for Jampa and happily agreed to do so.

In a conversation between Jampa and me regarding the band, he told me about what inspired him to express such an abnormal form of art. After World War II, certain absurdist fiction plays by several European authors in the late 1950s came to be known as The Theatre of the Absurd. This form of theatre seeks to startle its audience, confront them with the harsh realities of the world and challenge the status quo. After meeting with Jampa weekly and hearing about the eighty years he's spent on Earth, it does not surprise me that he would identify a part of himself with The Theatre of the Absurd. If there's one thing, I've learned about Jampa, it's that he has a very philosophical way of thinking and lives a life outside of the box. Another similar genre that the band takes inspiration from is known as "Dada" theatre. Dada theatre uses strange concepts, disjointed stories, and unpredictability as the foundation for its productions. After watching the performance, I was able to draw connections from this genre and compare it with The Headlight Children.

The production itself was quite entertaining and enjoyable to watch. Catherine acted as the front man, blowing the crowd away with her hula-hooping abilities, while Stephen and Leo sat in chairs behind her creating spontaneous melodies that could grab the attention of anyone walking by. As the show began, Stephen started playing a blues rhythm on his guitar while Leo created a melody by picking individual notes one after another. I remember when the music started playing and Kama started to dance, the weather began to change, and the sun hid behind the clouds. The sudden change in lighting along with a slight breezy overcast added a somber effect to the performance. About halfway through the first song, Jampa began to recite one of his original poems called "The Eye of The Child." It was at this time that it really clicked for me that art does not have to follow a set of rules. This had been something Jampa has enlightened me about over the past several months. Art is the greatest form of expression; it can look or sound however you'd like it to.

One thing I really liked about The Headlight Children's Act was the amount of originality displayed by each member. It was clear to me from the start that the band was made up of four individuals who were passionate about their skills and wanted to come together and share

them with the community. How often is it that you come across a group of two guitarists, one poet, and one hula-hooper? I enjoyed observing the level of improvisation that was embedded in the show. Most theatre performances follow some sort of dialogue or outline, but The Headlight Children found a way to steal the show using pure imagination. There were no specific costume designs except for the headlamps that Jampa brought for each member. He and I were the only ones that ended up wearing them because they would interfere with the physical activity required from the others. When I asked Jampa where the name “headlight children” came from he explained to me a concept that revolved around headlights on a car and how the two shine together toward infinity, representing how knowledge and knowing come together. I thought this was cool because I was right in thinking that it symbolized the third eye.

Seeing a live piece of theatre is entirely different than reading a play in my opinion. When reading a play, there are oftentimes already interpretations placed over it by other people. The act of reading a play requires the person to visualize the story in their head based on their perceptions of what is written. That said, watching live theatre face-to-face allows the audience to make interpretations using their own senses. This creates a more pleasurable experience, one that is more likely to be remembered. You can see the characters, settings, and activities when you go to a live theatre performance. You can observe how the director and the actors interpret the material, you may completely immerse yourself in the story and gain a fresh understanding of it, making this an engaging experience. Both reading a play and going to see one on stage offer advantages of their own, and they are complementary. While watching a performance enables you to witness how the tale is brought to life and develop your own perception, reading a play enables you to interact with the narrative in your own way.

The stage for The Headlight Children's production was not in your typical auditorium but rather a small grassy area, outside the library. The setting can be compared to what is known as a site-specific theater and is described as a theatrical performance that takes place somewhere other than a traditional theatre and is not typically a venue. It is possible that the creators of this special location had no intention of using it for theatrical reasons. The headlight children's performance took place in a setting that welcomed everyone, those taking part in the farmers market could hear the music from the venues where they worked. I saw this to be a quite fitting place to host an event as it was right in the middle of town on a beautiful, busy, Sunday afternoon. Considering it was my responsibility to film the act, it was important for me to use special techniques involving camera placement and movement. Before the show, Kama had asked if, at some point, I could show the audience in the video. It was a challenge finding the right angles, but I think I pulled it off well putting most of the focus on Kama's hula-hooping. There were not many other staging techniques involved in the performance considering it was not meant to come across as your typical organized play. Overall, the show was great and attracted a good-sized crowd. It was fun being a part of this event and I feel I've learned a lot.

View at [\(10\) Headlight Children at the Library - YouTube](#) (Part 1) & [\(10\) Headlight Children at the Library Part 2 - YouTube](#)

