

THEATER REVIEW

'Kimberly Akimbo' cast brings life to flawed family

By Rob Cline, correspondent

'**K**imberly Akimbo" features a dysfunctional family, the adult members of which are each wrapped up in self-delusion of one sort or another. Meanwhile, the teenage Kimberly, who has a disease that causes her to age at 4 1/2 times the normal rate, struggles to get the family to see things as they are before it's too late.

The Riverside Theatre production of the play, which opened to a surprisingly small audience Friday night, fully exploits the script's humor and poignancy. Under the direction of Sean Christopher Lewis, the cast brings vibrancy, desperation and hope to its portrayal of this deeply flawed family.

Jody Hovland stars as Kimberly, and her portrayal of a teenager trapped in the body of



Bob Goodfellow

Jody Hovland (as Kimberly) and Frankie Rose (as Jeff) perform in "Kimberly Akimbo" by David Lindsay-Abaire, which opened Friday and continues through Nov. 2 at Riverside Theatre in Iowa City.

a senior citizen is wonderful. She nails the rhythms of teenage speech, particularly when Kimberly is furious or nervous. She mopes and rages and schemes and hopes with the intensity of a young person just starting to find her way even as her character faces the prospect of an early death. It's a delightful and moving performance.

Hovland is well supported by Tim Budd as Buddy, her disappointed father; Carrie Houchins-Witt as Pattie, her pregnant mother who suffers from medical conditions real and imagined; and Kristy Hartsgrove Mooers as Debra, Kim's criminally inclined aunt who believes one more caper will bring her a better life.

Budd, in particular, is strong in this production. His character undergoes the biggest change over the course of the story. We first meet him drunk and hours late to pick up Kimberly at the skating rink. Frustrated by his lot in life, he neverthe-

IF YOU GO

- **What:** "Kimberly Akimbo"
- **When:** 7:30 p.m. Thursday, 2 p.m. Sundays and 7:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays through Nov. 2
- **Where:** Riverside Theatre, 213 N. Gilbert St., Iowa City
- **Tickets:** \$18 to \$30

less tries to be a good father to Kimberly, working to keep a difficult promise in the play's second half. Budd clearly understands what's in the character's heart, and he brings that to the forefront throughout.

The finest performance of the night, however, was turned in by Riverside Theatre newcomer Frankie Rose, who portrays the one character who isn't a member of Kimberly's family. Rose plays Jeff, a classmate of Kimberly's who first gets to know her by doing a report on her disease. Jeff is the one character in the play who always see Kimberly for what she is — a teenager — and never wishes for her

to be anything else.

Rose captures Jeff's awkwardness and enthusiasm for geeky pastimes — role-playing games among them — as well as his tender feelings for Kimberly. Hovland and Rose are entirely believable as a couple of teenagers fumbling toward love, and Rose's appealing performance is essential to that chemistry.

A single bench serves as the central piece of Courtney Schmitz's set. Along the back of the stage, she crafted a sculpture of bare branches and red berries meant, according to her notes, to reflect the play's intermixing of Kimberly's apparent age and her youthful vibrancy. I might not have gleaned that without the explanatory note, but the piece does allow for the creation of indoor and outdoor spaces with just a few deft strokes.

This production of "Kimberly Akimbo" deserves to find its audience as the run continues.

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