

# The yea! yea! sisterhood

'The Brontes': You read the books, and now you'll love the play

BY PETER MARKS

In this age of merry mashups, few fusions have offered quite as much potential for delectable irony on a stage as the idea of the three singing Bronte sisters.

Actually, there was a brother, as well, in this 19th-century retinue of literary siblings, and bless his heart, Branwell Bronte gets equal billing with his more famous sisters in "The Brontes," a delightful musical satire at the Capital Fringe Festival, brought to you by the comedically enterprising folks at Dizzy Miss Lizzie's Roadside Revue.

Set to the bluegrass and rock-inflected compositions of Steve McWilliams and Debra Buonaccorsi, "The Brontes" is an im-

pressive vehicle on which to travel into Dizzy Miss Lizzie's imagination. In fact, at less than 90 minutes, the production and its cast of nine — several of whom do double duty as band members — hardly exhaust an audience's appetite for the juicy amusements they brandish.

Mind you, I saw "The Brontes" under a sweltering tent on a blistering afternoon, when you could have poached a salmon on a bare seat. Yes, I wanted to escape the oppressive atmosphere, but not even under the threat of imminent heat stroke did I consider missing a moment. Thanks to directors Rick Hammerly and Buonaccorsi and a cadre of marvelous actor-entertainers — among them, Dani Stoller, Matthew Schleigh, Laura Keena and Buonaccorsi herself — cool was the prevailing theatrical front.

These four performers play the Brontes, with Stoller as Emily (author of "Wuthering

Heights") and Buonaccorsi portraying Charlotte ("Jane Eyre"). Through a dozen songs (and a series of, yes, artful metaphors), family troubles spill out, premature deaths are recounted and plots of famous novels reenacted. The tragic epiphany of the disappointed Anne Bronte is hauntingly rendered by Keena in the show's most resonant number, "Anne's Song," while Schleigh brings charm and technical skill to the rock ballad "God Knows."

Gillian Shelly and Jordan Klein provide potent turns as two of the carnival figures who help shepherd the narrative, and designer Maria Royals mashes things up vibrantly, too, in the eye-catching get-ups she assembles from three centuries of fashion. It's all put together with so much wit and panache that one hopes the revue, living up to its name, gets to take "The Brontes" on the road.

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