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[HOME](#) > [ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT](#) > "NOMADAS" IS A TRIUMPH FOR LA LLAVE MAESTRA

"Nomadas" is a Triumph for La Llave Maestra

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La Llave Maestra presents "Nomadas"

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The North Carolina Theatre for Young People at UNCG presented "Nomadas," an innovative and imaginative theatre show on Sunday, as part of Greensboro's 17 Days Art and Culture festival.

The work was performed by La Llave Maestra, a five-member Spanish and Chilean theatre troupe that showcases their four-show oeuvre in multiple countries around the world. The group focuses on visual and object theatre, a form of production that utilizes

props, puppets and other physical items to express emotions and plot as opposed to using traditional storytelling means.

Much of La Llave Maestra's works focus on themes of identity, travel and immigration. "Nomadas," the Spanish word for "nomads," is no exception – it features three main characters and their literal migratory journeys as well as their metaphorical journeys through life, their emotions and their dreams. "Children From Winnipeg," another one of the troupe's productions, was created to honor the young refugees who fled the Spanish Civil War in 1938. Many of these kids came on the Winnipeg, a ship brought from France to Chile by poet Pablo Neruda.

In fact, La Llave Maestra places an important emphasis on connecting with children through their works. Much of their plays employ a youthful innocence that draws in younger audiences along with the utilization of puppetry, a standardly "juvenile" practice. "Bestiary," one of the troupe's first productions, utilizes fantastical masks, props and costumes to explore the imaginary world of children and their interest in animals. "Nomadas" was marketed to individuals ages seven and older.

The works also resonate with the heavily multicultural and large migratory populations of Greensboro. Rachel Briley, artistic director of the North Carolina Theatre for Young People, states that themes of refuge, exile, and immigration "are the themes that matter to the lives of people who live in our community."

This was proven in a time of brief adversity faced by the cast – Briley had originally received a \$20,000 grant from the U.S Embassy in Chile in order to produce "Nomadas" in America, but funding was eventually pulled by the Trump administration. As a result, UNCG and the surrounding community came together to ensure that La Llave Maestra made it to the U.S., offering free housing and meals for their stay.

In addition to their main shows, La Llave Maestra also provides workshops, seminars and master classes to educate and train others in the virtues of object theatre.

"Nomadas" is a work produced completely without text, so the use of props and other physical objects is essential to conveying the emotions and motifs expressed within. Many of La Llave Maestra's props are repurposed, made with everyday materials including paper, fabric and plastic. These materials are combined in increasingly creative ways that shock and pleasantly surprise the audience as the show continues.

The work also utilizes the multifaceted nature of lighting to produce an illusory, almost otherworldly experience for the audience. Throughout the show, the stage was bathed in black, outside of some very carefully placed spotlights on specific props and characters. A smoke machine whirled ghostly plumes across the floor, wispy tendrils extending into the front rows of the audience, obscuring the crowd's view of the performers.

In one scene, a group of performers marches, hunched forward across the dimly lit stage, lumps and stacks of cardboard boxes covering their faces, heavy brown suitcases in their hands. In another, a young female character twist and turns in circles, clutching a puppet made solely of a mannequin head, a bowler hat and large strips of plastic that sway in the breeze.

Much of the show exists in a surreal, dreamlike state that seemingly plunges the audience into another dimension entirely, a world in which reality exists but is heavily distorted by the playful innocence of the characters and storyline. The work is at once mischievous and lively, serious and groundbreaking, good-natured and whimsical. The dramatic performance delights the audience while continuing to emphasize themes of the utmost importance and political relevance.

In this way, “Nomadas” can be seen as a triumphant work of theatre – adding a new layer of spirited, child-like perception in a world that has become increasingly dark.

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