

STAGE REVIEW

A playful 'Flora & Ulysses' boasts a 'rodentine' superhero saving the day

A charming, scene-stealing cast brings the Kate DiCamillo novel to life

By **Terry Byrne** Globe correspondent, Updated February 18, 2025, [2 hours ago](#)



"Flora & Ulysses" at the Wheelock Family Theater. NILE SCOTT STUDIOS

Holy unanticipated occurrences! A flying squirrel puppet, a feisty 10-year-old named Flora, and a boy banished from England with temporary blindness join forces for a

delightful theatrical adventure in “Flora & Ulysses,” an adaptation of the Kate DiCamillo novel playing at the Wheelock Family Theatre through March 9.

Full disclosure: I am a Kate DiCamillo fangirl, and even though I’m not exactly her target audience (independent readers ages 8-12), her novels (which include “The Tale of Despereaux,” “The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane,” “Because of Winn Dixie,” and “The Magician’s Elephant,” to name just a few) are filled with a childlike wonder that is enchanting at every age.

“Flora & Ulysses” follows the comic book-obsessed Flora, who, in the face of her parents’ recent divorce, has declared herself a cynic and lives by the motto: “don’t hope, observe.” But when she saves the life of a squirrel sucked up into a vacuum cleaner, life takes a remarkable turn. The squirrel, whom Flora names Ulysses, has acquired superpowers (along with his insatiable need for food) and when he reads Flora’s favorite comic book featuring the superhero, Incandesto, he decides his purpose is to right wrongs and fight for justice. Oh, and also to type poetry on Flora’s mom’s typewriter.

Chris Stahl is charming as Ulysses, managing to manipulate Amanda Gibson’s oversize squirrel puppet *and* deliver sincere narrations of Ulysses’s thoughts. When it’s time for Ulysses to be quiet, Stahl stands still with the puppet tail snuggling up along his neck. There’s never a moment of disconnect between the human and the squirrel (even when the two are physically disconnected), with Stahl’s wide smile and open attitude making us feel we are communicating directly with this “rodentine” superhero.

Director Joshua Rashon Streeter encourages a sense of play across his ensemble, with every member of the company inserting distinctive quirks into their characters. Livia Ketri delivers just the right spunky independence as Flora, and her scenes with Jack Baumrind (as William Spivack, her unexpected friend and ally), sparkle with joyful energy and sincerity.

While the focus is on Flora, Ulysses, and William, several adults orbit around them, including Flora’s mom, Phyllis, dad, George, and neighbors. Since the adults support the

kids' story, the actors take on multiple roles, with Kayla Shimizu (as Phyllis and Ernie, the cook at Do-Nut World, where Ulysses creates chaos), Damon Singletary (as the modest George and the brilliant Incandesto), and Cheryl McMahon, who nearly steals the show as Flora's neighbor and William's great-aunt Tootie Tickham, a hilariously sassy waitress at the Giant Do-Nut, and Dr. Meescham, her father's wise friend and neighbor.

Ulysses and Flora's adventures cover a lot of ground, and John Glore's theatrical adaptation tries to fit all of them into the fast-paced, 90-minute show. Danielle Delafuente's modular scenic design ably captures the multiple locations, but the scene changes too often slow the action to a crawl, even as we race through the story at the expense of some nuances and character development. Fortunately, projections designer Justin Lahue animates the scenes with comic book-style thought bubbles, and Saskia Martinez creates just the right props to accent the action.

Flora and Ulysses's adventures culminate in a heartwarming climax, reminding us of the importance of resilience in the face of loss, the power of connecting, and the gift of forgiveness, all of which are timeless.

FLORA & ULYSSES

Play by John Glore. Based on the novel by Kate DiCamillo. Directed by Joshua Rashon Streeter. Presented by Wheelock Family Theater, 300 The Riverway. Through March 9. Tickets \$26-\$52. www.wheelockfamilytheatre.org/performances/current-season/flora-ulysses/

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