

STAGE REVIEW

In Kirsten Greenidge's 'Morning, Noon, and Night,' there's light at the end of the pandemic

By **Terry Byrne** Globe correspondent, Updated April 30, 2024, 5:33 p.m.



From left: Schanaya Barrows, Sydney Jackson, and Aislinn Brophy in "Morning, Noon, and Night." KEN YOTSUKURA

In the midst of a 15-year-old's meltdown, her friends implore her to repeat: "Breathe, [expletive] ... We've got LIVING to do!"

That simple mantra, repeated with growing exuberance by a trio of teens at the center

of “Morning, Noon, and Night,” becomes a demand, a release, and a path forward out of the emotional paralysis that remains difficult to shake post-pandemic. And it’s fitting that it comes out of the mouths of these loyal friends.

Kirsten Greenidge’s newest work, which is having its world premiere in a Company One Theatre production at the Boston Center for the Arts’ Plaza Theatre, is fueled by love and joy, not to mention the power of friendship. What makes this story so compelling is Greenidge’s ability to juxtapose the simplest funny moments — a decision between lasagna or fish for a birthday dinner, an endless workout routine, strategies to get out of standing in front of chemistry class — with deeply felt emotions and existential dread.



Alexandria King (left) and Kaili Y. Turner in "Morning, Noon, and Night." KEN YOTSUKURA

It’s a tricky balance made to look effortless by the outstanding performances of all six members of the ensemble, guided by the creative and sure-handed direction of

Summer L. Williams. The cast includes Kaili Y. Turner as Mia, who is adjusting to a her role as the mother of an independent adult and of a teen on the verge of becoming one; Eliza Fichter as Heather, Mia's longtime friend who has become increasingly distracted by her own busy life; and Alexandria King as TikTok star Miss Candice, who merges 1950s Donna Reed style with Black girl magic. But the real standouts are Sydney Jackson, Schanaya Barrows, and Aislinn Brophy, who deliver absolutely transparent and yet complicated portrayals of three 15-year-olds confronting more than their share of adult responsibilities.

We meet Mia as her daughter Dailyn (Jackson) is encouraging her to host a big birthday party for her older sister that night. Their mom-daughter banter is recognizable and a little heartbreaking as the roles keep shifting: mom advising her teen and then the teen gently parenting her mom. But we soon discover Mia is trapped in an unending loop of Zoom work meetings and too many Amazon purchases strewn around her cluttered home, all adding up to a feeling that the world is closing in on her. Turns out, the older daughter whose birthday it is hasn't spoken to her mother since she moved out months ago and Mia's barely left the house or socialized since the pandemic began.

This morning, however, she steps out to meet her friend Heather for a workout class that requires a wearable that zaps them every time they stop moving. During the routine, Heather keeps up a continuous commentary around her family, her children, her job, her husband, her obsession with hand sanitizers (even as a face wash), made even more hilarious by the fact that Fichter never stops moving or gets out of breath.



Kaili Y. Turner (left) and Eliza Fichter in "Morning, Noon, and Night." KEN YOTSUKURA

For the play's afternoon section, Greenidge shifts from mothers to children: Dailyn, Chloe (Barrows), and Nat (Brophy), who are confronting their own stressors — standardized-test expectations, teachers who refuse to use Nat's chosen name, and Dailyn's fears about the death of the planet. It turns out, however, these 10th-graders refuse to be passive. They team up to help Dailyn help her mother, assisted by a "magical force" — a wish — made real by the strength of their desire.

Greenidge's shift into magical realism — helped by the irresistible King ("Cleanliness," Miss Candice proclaims sweetly, "is spiritual bliss") — and some spot-on TikTok-like videos from projections designer Maria Servellón (complete with viewer comments), provide the perfect jolt Mia and all these characters need at this moment. Justin Lahue's scenic design features vertical panels that let us know where we are at any given moment, aided by Christopher Brusberg's evocative lighting.

The pandemic left many of us unmoored in ways that have been difficult to articulate, but Greenidge has crafted such recognizable characters we can't help but lean in. Their conversations are unnervingly familiar, heightened by Greenidge's ear for humor and absurdity.

The appropriate response to break out of the post-pandemic fog, according to the women of "Morning, Noon, and Night," is to let go of what's not important and hold tight to what is — the people you love. Which is a great message to carry out of the theater.

MORNING, NOON, AND NIGHT

By Kirsten Greenidge. Directed by Summer L. Williams. Presented by Company One Theatre. At the Plaza Theatre, Boston Center for the Arts. Through May 25. Tickets are pay what you choose. [Companyone.org](https://companyone.org)

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