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Rink Life takes us on a circular journey through collaboration

Lucky Plush's new ensemble piece uses the roller rink as a metaphor for community.

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Rink Life

BENJAMIN WARDELL

Ah, the roller rink—a community center where everyone keeps moving in circles, forever, to retro pop songs, in colored slacks and bowl cuts. There is no time there. There is no world beyond its borders. There's only the supremely charming Lucky Plush ensemble, sliding their bare and socked feet over the Marley flooring in Steppenwolf's black-box theater. *Rink Life*, devised by director Julia Rhoads in collaboration with the ensemble, brings life to this insular society, where everyone mostly gets along most of the time. "Do you remember what you told me?" asks Mindy (Melinda Jean Myers, stepping into a role originated by Elizabeth Luse) at the top of the show. "I've told you many things," replies Michel (Michel Rodriguez Cintra). It's a dodge that creates a loop of action and conversation, all wrapped in a haze of nostalgia, which is how things happen on the rink. Mindy and Michel rehearse their duet, but their timing is off. They try to sing together, but they can't remember the words.

Rink Life
Through 11/17: Thu-Sat 8 PM, Sun 2 PM, Steppenwolf 1700 Theatre, 1700 N. Halsted, 312-335-1650, luckyplush.com, \$15-\$40. All performances currently sold out; call for information about waiting list.

Everyone sings on the rink, sometimes in tight harmonies that rub the room into a resonant glow, other times in a cacophonous mess of earworms. Often, they practice, standing in a semicircle making solfege hand signs. They take a similar stance to indicate listening or "holding space" for each other, as they call it: the palm up and extended. (It's a pun—the opposite of "mi," get it?)

Commitment is the recurrent theme of the piece: Jacinda (Jacinda Ratcliffe) has returned from being elsewhere, but is she here for a full membership or only for a day pass, Kara (Kara Brody) wants to know. When Jacinda slips right back into the groove in an intricate duet with Michel, Mindy wants to know how to get him to show up for rehearsal with her. Everyone is anxious about the idea—Mindy even took a "marriage fitness survey" before her wedding (the only reference to an off-rink relationship, but all the rink regulars were there for it, so was it really extracur-rink-ular?).

Performing commitment and forming community occur in the same activities on the rink, whether it's singing, dancing (ahem, skating), or playing games (varieties of Keep Away, Red Rover, and the dozens). Lucky Plush has a wonderful trick of producing moments of unison, balance, and coordination that arise like miracles from disorder. In *Rink Life*, these structures are immediately disrupted by each character's pesky personal needs and proclivities. "I wasn't feeling that," says Jacinda to Kara and Kara to Jacinda, each choosing a different method of negotiating each person's responsibility to the group. Yet the final images—of individuals momentarily and impossibly levitating in space, supported by the others—resolve the work beautifully. **R**