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## Theater

# What do our 11- and 15-year-old reviewers — and their mom — think of new musical ‘Bliss’ at Seattle’s 5th Ave?

Feb. 17, 2020 at 6:00 am | Updated Feb. 17, 2020 at 9:03 am



**1 of 2** | In the original musical “Bliss,” having its world premiere at The Fifth Avenue Theatre, sisters are the solution instead of princes. (Mark Kitaoka)



By [Gemma Alexander](#), [Xuan Moses](#) and [Aranya Moses](#)

## Theater review

On Feb. 14, after a week of previews, The 5th Avenue Theatre officially premiered its 23rd new musical — the third this season — a fractured fairy tale called “Bliss.” The book, music, and lyrics are by Emma Lively and Tyler Beattie, and the cast comprises Broadway veterans who are almost entirely new to the 5th.

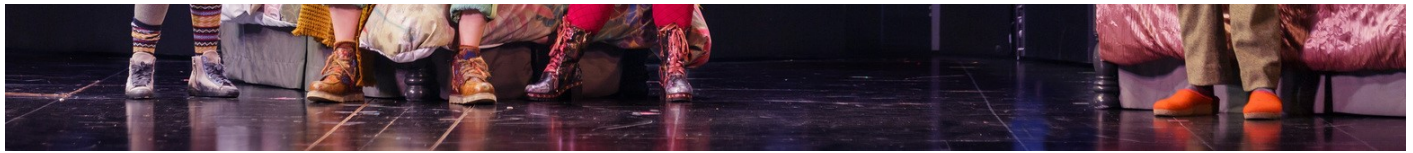
To review this original family-friendly production, The Seattle Times sent a family: arts writer Gemma Alexander and her daughters, 15-year-old high school sophomore and musical theater fan Xuan Moses, and 11-year-old fifth-grade budding critic Aranya Moses.

**Gemma:** February has given Seattle two musical fairy tales where sisters are the solution instead of princes, with Disney’s “Frozen” and “Bliss” opening a week apart. Both are loads of fun, but as different as “Cats” and “The Lion King.”

After months on Broadway, [the touring “Frozen”](#) was slick, flashy and sentimental. “Bliss,” which premiered after a special effects equipment failure led to a week of canceled previews, was quirky, funny and, dare I say, authentic? Yeah, it can be a cringey word, but authenticity is a major theme in “Bliss,” and I think they pull it off.







Gizel Jiménez (Piper), Kristolyn Lloyd (Faye), Claire Neumann (Holly) and Katy Geraghty (Carmella) play four princesses locked in a tower, educated by their dad The King (played by Manu Narayan) in “Bliss” at The 5th Avenue... (Mark Kitaoka) **More** ∨

**Aranya:** The story is about four princesses locked in a tower after their mother died — a classic plotline. The twist is that their dad educates them during their imprisonment. They learn languages, math and science. The only subject he forgot to teach was the rules of society. So when the four sisters sneak out, POOF! everything is chaos. A fairy godfather promises them happily ever after. Sadly, his version of happily ever after is the old Disney one where a prince solves all of a princess’s problems.

**Gemma:** One of my only reservations about “Bliss” was that the comic elements of fairy godfather Pincus Glimmermore (Mario Cantone) undercut his villainy. He’s best when he’s obviously representing the capitalist patriarchy. The line, “Their confidence is down, their wants are up,” is Faustian and sinister and I wanted more of it. (I don’t think it’s much of a spoiler to call him the villain. We all decided he was not just a well-intentioned but misguided mentor early in the show. “Shrek 2” taught us to be suspicious of fairy godparents.)



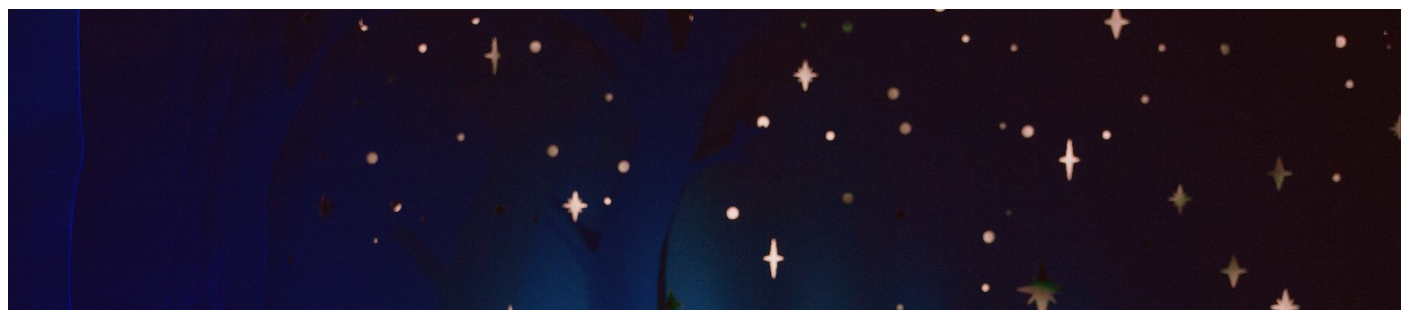


Mario Cantone (top center) plays fairy godfather Sir Pincus Glimmermore in “Bliss” at The 5th Avenue Theatre. (Mark Kitaoka)

**Xuan:** The rest of “Bliss” was different and fun, though, because the plot revolved around female empowerment, acceptance, and sisterhood. Like the Webtoon “[Cursed Princess Club](#),” “Bliss” pokes fun at the perfect princess idea by exaggerating the differences between perfect princesses and the sisters. After their mother’s death, Faye (Kristolyn Lloyd), the oldest, had to act as a stand-in mother, while pushing her lifelong dream of slaying a dragon deep down inside. She had a beautiful voice — it was my favorite because of its power and velvety sound.

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**Aranya:** I immediately felt like I knew all four of the sisters in real life and really got attached to them. The loud princess, Carmella (Katy Geraghty), was like my sister. Weird Princess Holly (Claire Neumann) acted like me and my friends when we are together. We don’t go skinny dipping with goats, but we do make friends with worms. Princess Faye was like an older sister who will always protect you because you have been friends since the beginning of time. But also, please don’t kill dragons.







Katy Geraghty (Carmella), Claire Neumann (Holly), Kristolyn Lloyd (Faye), and Gizel Jiménez (Piper) play four sisters whom our reviewers easily related to in “Bliss” at The 5th Avenue Theatre. (Mark Kitaoka)

**Gemma:** I really enjoyed how much vocal variety they created with four sopranos to illustrate the princesses’ unique personalities — scientific Piper (Gizel Jiménez) was a fabulous cross between Ella of “Ella Enchanted” and Luke’s daughter April on “Gilmore Girls.” But the secondary characters were great, too. I snorted more than once during Prince Devin’s (Conor Ryan) scenes. He was revolting, but also one bottle of Aqua Net away from the posters on my bedroom wall when I was teenager. In contrast, sweet Toby the cobbler (John Michael-Lyles) was a balm against toxic masculinity with his supportive love for as-is Piper.





John-Michael Lyles plays sweet cobbler Toby in “Bliss” at The 5th Avenue Theatre. (Mark Kitaoka)

**Xuan:** Since the plot didn’t follow romantic comedy conventions, the songs couldn’t follow the Broadway musical blueprint. I can’t wait until I can download the soundtrack. Piper’s heartfelt “Save a Dance” was about wanting more and wanting to feel included and was so relatable. Devin’s “Through the Night” was amusing and over the top, even a bit sensual. Even the jester chorus somehow had personalities. They also had great dance choreography. They even made clearing sparkles off the stage with leaf blowers interesting.

**Gemma:** There are so many fun, wonderful touches in “Bliss.” Star-struck Carmella’s explanation of feminism, the way even the prince is bored by perfect princesses (“You’re weird but you’re not boring” might be the most romantic line I’ve heard on stage), and the observation that sometimes you have to slay your dragon before you can run to someone else’s rescue.

**Xuan:** I loved the unconventional princesses and what each of them brought. The plot point of “princess dipping” was a very good way of showing how conforming to society’s expectations just takes away individuality.

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**Aranya:** Just like the main characters were different from any princesses you’ve seen, “Bliss” made its own rules to follow. It made fun of stereotypes and didn’t follow the same boring music formula as other musicals. From beginning to end I loved it. I would definitely recommend.

**Gemma:** “Bliss” isn’t quite groundbreaking, but it is unusual for Broadway-style musicals, and it’s a very welcome addition to the growing canon of new-generation feminist fairy tales. The beauty of “Bliss” is that it’s a laugh-out-loud comedy you can enjoy without caveats. It’s uncomplicated, wholesome, hilarious fun.

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“**Bliss,**” through Feb. 23; The 5th Avenue Theatre, 1308 Fifth Ave., Seattle; \$29 and up; 206-625-1900, [5thavenue.org](http://5thavenue.org)


*Gemma Alexander is a Seattle-based freelance writer; [gemmaealexander.com](http://gemmaealexander.com).*

**Xuan Moses**

**Aranya Moses**

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