

Lots of life in the lion's tale

Sally Bennett - Herald Sun
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PLAYWRIGHT LALLY KATZ AND THE STARCHASER CAST JAMISON CALDWELL, ANNE-LOUISE SARKS, PHILLIP MCINNES AND JESSICA CLARKE. PICTURE: DARREN TINDEALE HERALD SUN

LALLY Katz always dreamed of flying into outer space on a canopy bed with her childhood bestie, a stuffed toy lion.

Now the playwright and the lion have done it, figuratively speaking, in her new family production *Starchaser*, a fantasy adventure premiering at Arts Centre Melbourne this week.

"OK, I'll level with you," Katz says. "My lion has been in a couple of other things, too. That lion gets around.

"I've had it my whole life and I think I was 27 when I gave it to my parents and said, 'You take care of lion from now on because it's getting embarrassing'."



Katz, 33, happily delved into her childhood imagination to create *Starchaser* for the Arena Theatre Company. It is her third family show on a list of full-length plays that is now approaching 40.

Last year was her most successful yet with three premieres on main stages in Sydney and Melbourne - *Golem Story*, *Neighbourhood Watch* and *Return to Earth* - and several remounts at smaller theatres.

Only *Return to Earth* was a critical flop - "distressingly bad," one patron said - which never fails to cut Katz to the bone until she bounces back with another project.

"I'm really fickle. If audiences and reviewers don't like one of my plays I turn on it and want nothing to do with it," she says.

"Right now, *Starchaser* is one of my favourites, but if people don't like it, I'll turn on it too."

Starchaser is a tale of hope and adventure as two orphans, Catta and Tommy, travel through space to find the star that can bring their parents back to life.

Along the way they encounter the funny characters and dangers of different planets as their bed spaceship carries them onwards in their ambitious quest.

"It's about acceptance and valuing the past without living in it," Katz says. "It sounds sad because their parents have died, but it's really quite funny and adventurous."

Katz's playwriting career began as a teenager at her Canberra high school where many of her short plays were performed.

From there she studied at Melbourne University and the Victorian College of Arts and up until three years ago was still working full-time as a waitress to support her writing career.

Katz says she has no trouble switching between adult and child audiences and the key ingredient in all her work is finding a personal connection to the story.

"I actually think writing for kids and adults should be pretty much the same," she says. "It just has to be true to my heart. *Starchaser* is something that I'd been dreaming about for a long time."