

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

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Late Edition

New York: Today, partly sunny and less humid, high 83. Tonight, partly cloudy, low 66. Tomorrow, some sun, cooler, low humidity, high 79. Yesterday, high 83, low 70. Details, Page B7.

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Tada! Youth Theater

THE GUMBALL GANG: CRIME-SOLVING KIDS Bull's-eye. That's the image likely to be lingering in your mind long after seeing this lively comedy from Tada! Youth Theater. It first appears in the form of a large blue circle on a white canvas — a forgery of a modernist masterpiece, and the criminal evidence that sets this musical mystery in motion. But the invisible bull's-eyes are just as memorable: those on art-world pretension; on news-media pretension; on celebrity pretension; on pretension, period. The show aims at many targets, and hits them neatly.

Jim Colleran, the author, has set his hourlong romp in Littletown, a surprisingly cultured hamlet that's home to the Cosmopolitan Museum of Art. That institution is having an amateur competition while also showcasing a work by the renowned DelaGriofski. When it's discovered that the painting has been replaced by a fake, the Gumball Gang — a quintet of enterprising middle-school sleuths, led by the spunky Candy Krunch (Maya Park) — welcomes the case, while the aspiring journalists Morgan McCorgan and Lydia Lee (Nicholas Stewart and Casey Wenger-Schulman, left) see their opportunity to move from closed-circuit school TV to big-time cable.

Mr. Colleran, whose solution to the mystery is not the least bit obvious, seems to have put everything into his script: not the kitchen sink, but certainly the blue-tailed skink, a lizard that young eco-activists say DelaGriofski is using in his paint formulas. The subplots enable Tada! to show off the talents of a great many 9- to 17-year-olds, who under Janine Nina Trevens's direction ably perform Mr. Colleran's jazzy tunes and Joanna Greer's ebullient choreography. They can also say with a straight face the titles of works like "The Thrill of Boredom." But theatergoers their age can rest assured that there's nothing boring onstage. (Tomorrow and Sunday at 2 and 4 p.m. at Tada! Theater, 15 West 28th Street, Chelsea, 212-252-1619, www.tadatheater.com. Through July 28. \$18; \$8 for 15 and under.)

LAUREL GRAEBER