

'Driving Miss Daisy' an enjoyable ride

Quad City Times – May 13, 2004 - by Ruby Nancy

"Driving Miss Daisy" is a familiar story to many, thanks to a popular film, and the character study detailing a friendship that grows between an elderly Atlanta woman and her (also elderly) chauffeur features 23 brief scenes that cover a 25-year period offers plenty of laughter, though it is also laced with emotional and political undercurrents that cannot be overlooked.

Muff LoGuidice stars as the irascible and outspoken Daisy Werthan from the show's title, and she infuses the already feisty role with her own particular brand of "don't mess with this little old lady" attitude.

Saucy retorts and snappy observations mix with gentle humor, personal growth and occasional bouts of confusion in this wonderful portrayal, and LoGuidice lends Miss Daisy a bit of genteel steel that works perfectly.

Her performance alone is well worth the ticket price for this show — and then some — but this veteran performer is also joined by other talents that also add much to the show as a whole.

Reggie Jarrell plays Hoke Coleburn, the ultra-polite driver who proves to be one of the few people who can deal with Daisy's stubborn streak with equanimity. Jarrell's Hoke is unflappable, and the character provides a steadying influence that proves to be exactly what the prickly matron needs. Jarrell's work mixes just the right touch of deference with a bit of stubborn humor, and he plays off LoGuidice's sass with a certain amount of his own.

Michael Skiles plays Boolie Werthan, Daisy's put-upon son whose exasperation drove him to hire a driver for his mother in the first place, and he fleshes out what could be a one-dimensional role with true humanity. It's the best work I've seen Skiles do in the five years he's been involved in community theater, and his character's gradual assimilation into a larger, politically dicey culture is a telling commentary that contrasts well with the relationship that is the main focus of the play.

The Southern accents, often a problem for theaters in this area (especially to a critic who knows how it should sound), were actually quite good, offering a pretty decent mimicry of both the flat Atlanta money purr and the soft middle Georgia country drawl.

A number of wonderful costume changes (the work of a very talented Peggy Freeman) for LoGuidice and an extended sound track of popular music help show the passage of time, plus a relatively minimalist set allows the focus to be on the characters. The lovely costumes might have been the cause of the less-than-lightning-fast interludes between scenes — my only complaint — but each and every scene was well worth the wait.

Don't miss the chance to go along for "Driving Miss Daisy."

Poignant 'Driving Miss Daisy' carries us across a changing century

Argus/Disptach – May 14, 2004 - by Julie Jensen

The three-member cast of "Driving Miss Daisy" received a well-deserved standing ovation after their May 7 performance at the Richmond Hill Barn.

Muff LoGuidice surrenders her own persona to that of Daisy Werthan, a feisty 72-year-old widow who is no longer safe behind the wheel.

Michael Skiles as Boolie, her son, strikes a marvelous balance between being devoted to his mother and exasperated by her. Despite her adamant protests, he hires a chauffeur for her.

The chauffeur, Hoke Coleburn, is played by Reggie Jarrell, who also absorbs the part, becoming a black man in Atlanta before civil rights became an issue.

Sharon Luikhart is the director, assisted by Sandra Glass, and she makes the 23 episodic scenes in the play cohere. Since Miss Daisy is dressed differently in almost every one of them, this is no easy task. Music reflecting the years between 1948 and 1973, plus a few radio news reports, fill the gaps.

The set, created by Les and Roxanne Ritter, includes the car -- two spacious seats and a steering wheel -- Daisy's living room, and every corner of the theater for other locations called for by the plot.

The play evokes some gentle laughter, but it's mainly poignant as Hoke outlasts Miss Daisy's rejection. In one scene they are driving to Mobile, and Daisy recalls her first trip there. Hoke says he recalls his first trip, too, and when she asks, "When was that?" he tells her, "About 20 minutes ago."

This is the story of their relationship that moves from Miss Daisy's refusal to let Hoke drive her anywhere to her final confession: "You are my best friend."

In the beginning, she lets him sit in the kitchen all day, preferring to take a trolley to the Piggly-Wiggly to buy groceries.

Along the way, she discovers he can't read, and this revives the teacher in her. She also finds an empty salmon can in the trash and indignantly tells Boolie that Hoke is a thief. That's an accusation that she has to eat.

Daisy's relationship with her daughter-in-law, who is never seen, is acidic, as Boolie knows all too well.

The characters age in subtle ways as the years go by, and the final scene in a nursing home is deeply moving. At the final curtain, you really feel you have gone through a quarter-century of American history with these three.

The Barn theater's new amenities at the start of Richmond Hill's 37th season are an elevator to the stage level, and spacious restrooms in the main building.