

Theater drives *Miss Daisy* down uneven road



Photos by Sandra N. Robbins

(Above) Boolie Werthan (Dave Kelton), Hoke Coleburn (Harold Presley) and Daisy Werthan (Wanda Daisa) try to settle a disagreement

in a scene from Stage Center's opening performance of "Driving Miss Daisy." (Right) Hoke chauffeurs Miss Daisy around town.



By RUDY CORDOVA JR.
From New York to Hollywood, "Driving Miss Daisy" has left its tire marks on the stage and screen. The Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Alfred Uhry is now making those same tire marks in Bryan.

Directed by Donnie Wilson, Stage Center opened their 26th season with "Driving Miss Daisy" and a message to all theater lovers. Community theaters can still ride with the rest of them. Sometimes, Stage Center's ride was a little bumpy, but it eventually reached its destination.

Set in Atlanta, Georgia in 1948, "Driving Miss Daisy" is the story of two people from two different worlds who realize they live with human prejudice, just like the rest of us. Daisy Werthan is an elderly Jewish woman who cannot accept the fact that she's growing old and growing more and more dependent on others, especially when she has to depend on a black man.

Daisy's son Boolie Werthan hires an enthusiastic chauffeur named Hoke Coleburn, whose main dedication is to his work and service for others. Daisy feels threatened by the fact she is forced to depend on someone, but ends up admitting to

Hoke, later in the play, that they are best friends.

The play's climax comes as Hoke and Daisy are driving to the Jewish temple and are forced to turn around. The temple had been bombed. Daisy repeatedly yells "I can't believe it! I'm sure they meant to bomb one of the conservative synagogues or the orthodox one."

Hoke then quiets her with the most truthful line in the play.

"It doan' matter to them people. A Jew is a Jew to them folks. Jes' like light or dark we all the same nigger," he says.

Wanda Daisa plays Daisy Werthan

with grace and style but lost much of her emotion throughout most of the important scenes. She was poised, yet she wasn't pushed hard enough to actually submit to the role. I have to mention though, that Daisa played well off of Harold Presley who plays Hoke.

Presley commands the stage with his presence. He was the only character that actually forced me to believe him. Everything Hoke Coleburn wanted to say came through in Presley's performance. Boolie is played by Dave Kelton, who gives a respectable performance as Daisy's son.

The actual weakness of the play was in the transitions. The story moves quickly from one scene to the next. The actors looked rusty and would have gained much authority with another rehearsal.

Wilson directed "Driving Miss Daisy" without much focus. The problem is that there was not much of a cooperation between the written text and the performance. There is a lot of word play that was missed in the performance which could also be attributed to opening night jitters.

Scott Bagby designed the set and the lights. I did not have a problem with the set because it served its purpose.

The lighting, however, was an annoying distraction.

Harsh shadows were created by the use of front lighting only. The problem could have been eliminated through the use of on-stage lighting.

For example, there was a desk and a table that could have housed a lamp, thereby creating more of a natural effect. The scenes in the car, however worked beautifully because of the overhead lighting.

The use of slide projectors to impose images on screens behind the actors was a great addition to the play. A brilliant idea was used and experimented with and the director

made some wonderful decisions.

The slides helped to convey images that Alfred Uhry had intended through the text of the play.

Overall I congratulate Stage Center for an honest performance. I thought at times I felt that the director did not go far enough. I still commend this play to an audience that is willing to listen and understand what Uhry is trying to say.

Stage Center continues their production of "Driving Miss Daisy" three more performances on Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. Tickets can be reserved by calling the Box Office at 846-0287.



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