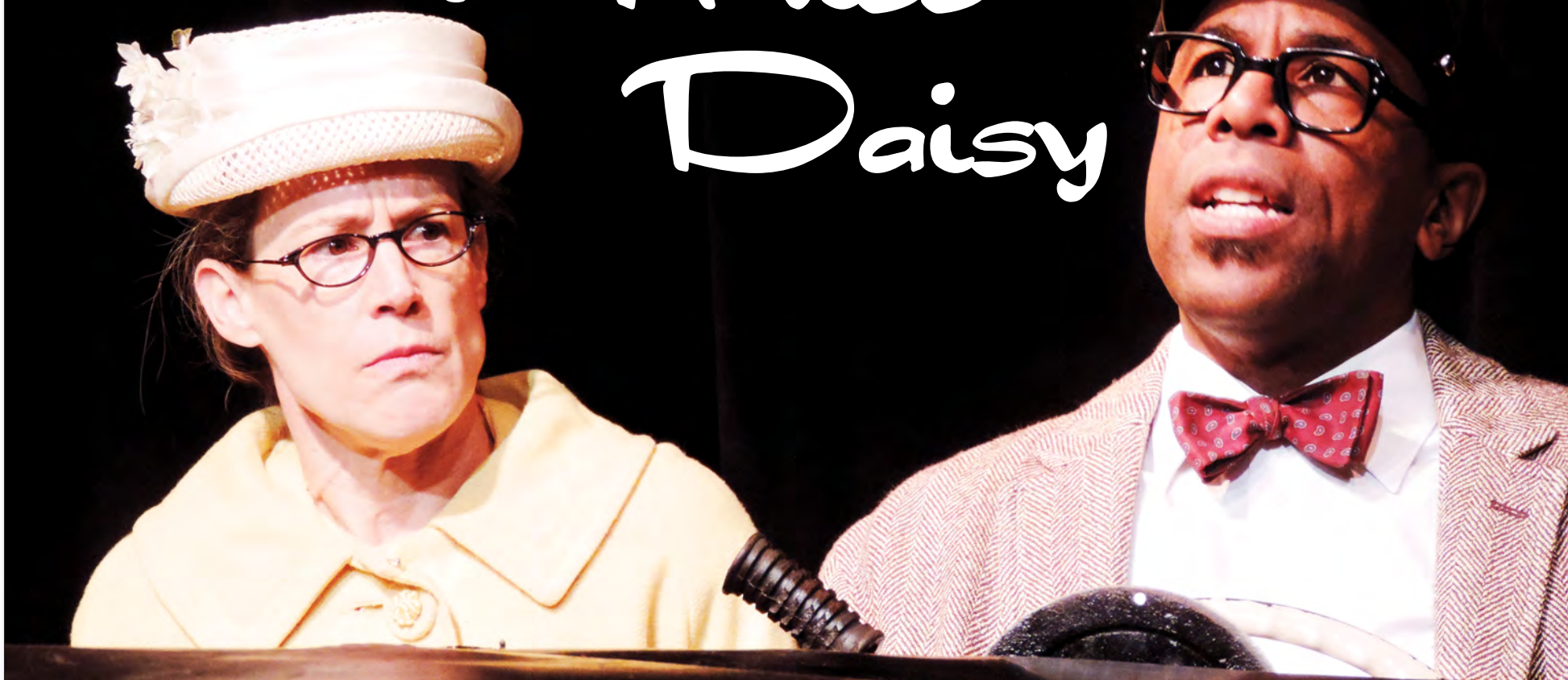




On Stage at CCA: Driving Miss Daisy



Dramatic production benefits three local nonprofits

Story and photos by
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"I ain' no dog and I ain' no chile and I ain' jes a back of the neck you look at while you goin' wherever you want to go." — Hoke Coleburn

Everyone wants to be in the driver's seat.

Daisy Werthan, an elderly Jewish woman, no longer can be. And her personal frustration at less control over her life is one drama in "Driving Miss Daisy," opening Jan. 17 at Columbia Center for the Arts.

Hoke Coleburn, a poor black man, IS in the driver seat, but he knows his place. And that changes, slowly but surely, with help from Daisy.

The dramas of "Driving Miss Daisy" do not exist in a vacuum. By turns funny and moving, Arthur Uhry's Pulitzer Prize-winning play also pulls in the struggle for civil rights, anti-Semitism, challenges of aging, and illiteracy.

The 1989 film won Oscars for Best Picture, Best Screenplay and Best Actress (Jessica Tandy).

"To Kill A Mockingbird," the August 2011 PFNP, which included all three cast members of "Driving Miss Daisy."

"Mockingbird," based on the Harper Lee novel, ended in early 1940s, and "Driving Miss Daisy" takes place from the late 1940s through mid-1970s.

In the Mockingbird production, Morrow portrayed the adult "Scout," the protagonist looking back on her childhood in Alabama. McNair played the tragic Tom Robinson, falsely accused of rape, and Thayer-Daugherty portrayed the prosecuting attorney who wins the case against Tom.

"We talked about doing it a year ago, and had to wait until everybody was available. We felt so strongly about the message of the 'Mockingbird' play," Dallman said.

"There are three themes at work: friendship, civil rights and literacy," Dallman said, "and aging; in that you have kids taking care of their parents. There are just a lot of themes that resonate with me."

McNair said, "This is an interesting piece; it's that progression. Going back to 'Mockingbird,' you had a character (Tom) who is trapped in an ugly situation, and there is nothing he can do about it. He has no control over his destiny. And here, you have moved forward to where Hoke, yes, he's in the South, but it's a progression, it's moving forward; and as things progress, Hoke is able to embrace the change and be able to grow with that."

"He also sees as a certain ally, Mr. Werthan and Daisy. A lot of blacks, being raised in the church, tend to identify with Moses and the Jews, and I think they see them as a persecuted people. They came through slavery, so there's a certain connection he finds with Jewish people, and it gives him a bit more freedom than with most whites."

This play depends upon the Daisy and Hoke actors establishing a rapport. McNair and Morrow bring an immediate flintiness that sparks with the perfect timing of their lines. Having worked together in "Mockingbird," it came naturally for McNair and Morrow.

"Our first read-through was by Skype, because Edward was in Argentina, and I just remember as soon as he started talking as Hoke, he was so wonderful," Morrow said, adding that McNair has had a challenge "in that his mind wanted to autocorrect things that Hoke says; his grammar."

McNair elocutes effectively, while communicating the accent and vernacular of an illiterate Georgia black man.

Boolie is the link between Daisy and Hoke, and the realities of his life as a Jewish businessman in the south embellish the bond between the Werthans and the man they have hired to drive Daisy. In one scene, Boolie tries to convince his mother not to attend a Martin Luther King dinner because it could mean business lost to competitors.

"So some of the boys might start throwing business to Jack instead of ole Martin Luther Werthan; I don't know, maybe it wouldn't happen, but that's the way it works. 'If we don't use those seats, somebody else will, and the good Doctor King

will never know the difference, will he?' There's a lot of racial things about it."

Thayer-Daugherty said, "I've never been a businessman. Luckily, I don't have to do that. I just feel a lot of empathy for someone who has to do business the way they have to do it. I would have a lot of empathy for a businessman, having to make all the decisions I'd have to make throughout my entire life. Empathy is the only way I know how to act. I just pretend I am and cross my fingers and hope it works."

Hoke and Boolie have their moments, but all roads lead through Daisy.

"She just says the most awful things," Morrow said. "It's like, 'I can't believe that's coming out of my mouth!'" Morrow said.

For example, about her African-American hired help, Daisy says, "They all take things, you know" and "They're like having children in the house, they just see something and take it"; and when she says "What a shame a wonderful girl like you never married," on the phone to her son's secretary.

"She truly thinks she has no prejudices," Morrow said.

"I've played old but to go from 72 to 97 is a bit of a stretch, and I'm still working that out ... the changes to the body and different ways I carry myself from one scene to the next," said Morrow, who at 52 is two years older than McNair. She got ideas from observing and talking with elderly people.

It was one thing to modulate her voice to portray someone 40 years older than she is, another to get inside the mind of a person experiencing significant memory loss, as Daisy does.

"There is the scene where she thinks she's a teacher again, and how do you think like someone who is really losing her memory? It's very difficult, the jumps she makes from one line to the next were interesting and I feel like I've got a handle on it."

"It's been a good challenge, the range of emotion from irritation at my (Daisy's) situation; she knows she needs a driver but doesn't want to admit it, and not wanting (Hoke) around, to the temple bombing scene, which is just heart-wrenching, and listening to Hoke's story about witnessing a lynching when he was a boy. It's interesting to decide how to play it."

"At one point Hoke tells Daisy, 'You go ahead and cry,' and I say 'I'm not crying,' but it makes me want to cry just thinking about that little boy, and Daisy was a fifth-grade teacher and that's the age she taught, and I know she was thinking, 'That could have been my student'."



DRIVING interplay between Daisy Werthan (Kathleen Morrow) and Hoke Coleburn (Edward McNair), at top, defines the oft-comic drama. They sit in a stage prop automobile created by Gary Fisher of Hood River, out of an actual 1950 Chevrolet, in keeping with the story's period. At center, Daisy's son Boolie (William Thayer-Daugherty) tries to reason with his stubborn mother. Above, the playful, angry and pensive moods of Daisy Werthan.

TIMES AND TICKETS

"Driving Miss Daisy" runs Jan. 17-18 for SMART; Jan. 24-25 for the Next Door Inc. and Jan. 26 for Hood River Library.

All shows are at 7:30 p.m. except Jan. 26, which is a 2 p.m. matinee.

Tickets are \$18 for adults, \$15 for seniors and \$10 for students 17 and under, at Waucoma Bookstore or online at showtix4U.com

Production help comes from Jeff Cook, Adrian Chaton and Dell Charity.

"Driving Miss Daisy," directed by Lynda Dallman, is the next in Dallman's annual Plays for Non-Profits production. The play's frilly sounding title is itself a wry joke.

"Miss Daisy" is no willing blossom. She is a strong, potent force. Daisy is a retired teacher who crashes her car, leading her son, Boolie, to hire Hoke as her driver, very much against Daisy's will. However, a true friendship develops.

"I'm having fun with this role," said Kathleen Morrow, who portrays Daisy Werthan. Morrow is a local theater veteran who has handled light comedy to philosophical drama.

"The physical changes are fun, and the relationship between Daisy and Hoke is really fun to explore," she said.

Edward McNair plays the driver Hoke Coleburn and William Thayer-Daugherty portrays Daisy's son, businessman Boolie Werthan.

Now in its fifth year, Plays For Non-Profits benefits selected charities in the community. This year proceeds go to Start Making A Reader Today, The Next Door Inc. and Hood River Library (see sidebar for details).

Dallman describes "Driving Miss Daisy" as "a kind of sequel to

Plays for Non-Profits helps local organizations

Actors will present a free sampler of "Driving Miss Daisy" on Jan. 12, 2-4 p.m. at the Hood River County Library, which is one of three local programs receiving proceeds from the production.

The Next Door Inc.

The money will likely go to New

Parent Services, specifically because it tends to be under-funded, according to Development Director Heidi Venture of The Next Door. The goal of the program is to prevent child abuse and neglect.

New Parent Services works with mothers or couples who are having

a first child who is at risk for abuse or neglect.

"Typically it's a single mother that is left to care for her child. These parents could be at risk from abuse or neglect in their child."

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