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Talley's Folly

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Friday Nov 27, 2009

Christmas has come early this year and Theatre Three is playing Santa giving us a memorable, satisfying production of Lanford Wilson's Pulitzer Prize winning play, **Talley's Folly**.

Set on July 4, 1944, and played in real time (97 minutes, we are informed upfront), the play follows Matt Friedman's return to Lebanon, Missouri, to woo Sally Talley. Matt is a fortyish Jewish immigrant working as an accountant in St. Louis. Sally is the daughter of one of the wealthiest families in town, and is approaching spinsterdom (at the age of 31!). The two met the previous year and enjoyed a week together. After his return to St. Louis, Matt has written Sally every day and even surprised her at work one day (where she hid in the kitchen). Sally has only returned one of Matt's letters, discouraging his intentions. Despite this, Matt has written to her that he will return to Lebanon on July 4th and must see her.



Shauna McLean and Chuck Huber in Talley's Folly, playing through Dec. 20 at Theatre Three (Source:Ken Birdsell)

Talley's Folly is part romantic comedy, part drama, and part mystery. What makes Matt think that despite their different backgrounds and religions that he and Sally are meant for each other? Why is the liberal Sally so hesitant to leave her conservative home and town? Why is she so reluctant to return Matt's affections? The answers to these questions provide Talley's Folly with its dramatic weight. To give away anymore plot would spoil the charms Talley's cast in this beautifully written play filled with layers and layers of themes and subtext.



Playing the meatier role, Chuck Huber mesmerizes as the fussy, determined and tormented Matt. He employs a slight Eastern European accent, hinting at Matt's roots, and at lighter moments imitates Sally's southern relative's down-home accent; accents within accents. He is not only a fine comedic and dramatic actor, but also a master of physical acting, whether stalking angrily down a pier, attempting to skate in a boat house, or utilizing multiple small nuances such as continuing to wipe the 'sweat' off his forehead. It is a fully realized performance that deserves abundant accolades. While at first the role of Sally seems merely a re-active one, Shauna McLean takes us on the night's largest dramatic arc from stubborn refusal to gradual thawing to soul-bearing confessional. It's an honest performance as the audience accompanies Sally on her journey, which at first presents her as off-putting and cold, then moves us to tears in the climax. Yes, tears.

Director/Set Designer/Sound Designer Jeffrey Schmidt, while not on stage, is every bit the star of this production. The magnificent, whimsical set is the production's third character. It seems Sally's uncle was fond of building unusual structures throughout the town that came to be known as his follies. One such folly is the titular, neglected, Victorian-styled boathouse where the entire play unfolds. Completely surrounded by an actual raised pier that disappears into drooping weeping willows, this is the largest, most realized set I've ever seen produced in the small Theatre Three environment: it's stunning. And it's green: most of the boathouse, the boat, the water and the trees are made of recycled paper.

With most of the action confined to the L-shaped pier, Schmidt directs with an abundance of confidence. Sound Designer Schmidt adds subtle layer upon layer of

Southern river sounds (first water, then crickets, then frogs, etc.) until Huber and McLean have a virtual orchestra to accompany their romantic, dramatic dance.

Everyone involved with Theatre Three and Talley's Folly should be remarkably proud. This is, quite simply, one of the finest play I've seen this year. It would be your folly to miss it.

Talley's Folly continues through December 20, 2009 at Theatre Three, 2800 Routh Street, Suite 168, Dallas, TX 75201. For more information visit www.theatre3dallas.com

Doug Dodasovich is a playful free lance writer and designer who is passionate about live theater, dance and film. He and his husband, Mark enjoy reading, traveling, friends and family of choice and their 3 miniature dachshunds, Roxie, Velma and Seymour.

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