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# Paper Covers Dock

The best reason to see Theatre Three's "Talley's Folly" is Jeffrey Schmidt's eco-friendly set. Oh, there are actors and words, too.

by Mark Lowry

Published Sunday, November 29, 2009

Someone hand Jeffrey Schmidt the Theater Environmentalist of the Year award right now.

There's not one, you say? Well, here you go. Print this out and recycle it later.

Earlier this year, Schmidt designed the set, puppets and other production elements for the Drama Club's *The Old Woman in the Wood* completely from recycled and reusable products. Now he's doing the same for a much larger and more intricate scenic design, with **Talley's Folly** at Theatre Three. He also serves as director and sound designer, and boy, are those frog croaks and cricket chirps spot-on!

Seriously, it's quite fascinating. The set, that is.

The detailed little Missouri folly, or boathouse, is made of paper, as are a ramshackle rowboat, the surrounding water, lake plantlife and an exquisite willow tree on the shore. Some of that paper—none of which is painted, which gives the production a handsome, muted color scheme—came from T3's previous production of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, from the banners and posters that covered the walls of the school cafegymatorasium (or whatever they called it). The areas of the set on which the two actors walk are constructed of reclaimed timber, and will reportedly be reused in subsequent productions.

What's so fantastic about it—in addition to the materials, which takes the idea of "environmental theater" to a new level—is how Schmidt and his crew took time with the molding and detailing of the boathouse canopy, the rippled water and the aquatic plants. One imagines the set constructors sitting in an activity room strewn with little pairs of scissors and tubs of paste, cutting out shapes like



Shauna McLean and Chuck Huber. Photo by Ken Birdsell.



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## Talley's Folly

by Lanford Wilson

Presented by Theatre Three

November 23 - December 20  
 at **Theatre Three**  
 2800 Routh St., Suite 168  
 Dallas, TX 75201  
 214-871-3300  
 \$10-\$40

7:30pm Thursday, Sunday & Monday; 8pm Friday & Saturday;  
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 Runtime: 97 minutes with no intermission

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schoolchildren making paper snowflakes.


The play itself is delicate, like a snowflake. It's the lunchmeat of Lanford Wilson's sandwich about the Talley family, lying between the bread of *Talley & Son* and *Fifth of July*. In *Talley's Folly*, which won the 1980 Pulitzer Prize, 31-year-old Sally Talley (Shauna McLean) meets up with Matt Friedman (Chuck Huber), a 42-year-old Jewish man with whom she had a romance a year prior. He returns to the spot where they fell in love, hoping to convince her that they belong together. But she's resistant. After all, her family is a proper American Midwestern clan, and he's Jewish. And it's 1944.

What happens in the play's 97 minutes—we know this because Friedman announces the runtime as part of his opening meta monologue—is a conversational, emotional dance ("a waltz," Wilson frequently reminds) between two people who might as well hook up. They seem destined to spend a lifetime talking each other's ears off. Their conversation brings up their personal and family histories, including Matt's discussion about the Prussians who became Lithuanians and Latvians. It probably couldn't go on for much longer, but Wilson sustains it with engaging dialogue and amusing meanderings (the ice skate segment is priceless). Wilson does have a way with words.

As director, Schmidt moves his actors comfortably about the boathouse and the dock that extends to the willow-dominated shore. Huber is charming and funny, but spends too much of his time struggling to connect with McLean, who has some fine acting moments but a blaring voice that's hard to love. What's missing is any kind of spark—however faint—that might convince that she's worth pursuing. Their final decision seems a product of exhaustion and concession. Given Matt's desperation and a few facts that are revealed about Sally, neither is likely to find anyone else. Just go with it.

Their bond is thinner than the primary material used in Schmidt's set, which despite its paper construction, looks sturdy and striking. It might appear in some other form after the recycling process, but at least it will last. That's more than Sally and Matt can say about their future together.

TJ



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