



Stunning Storytelling

The Drawer Boy is theater at its finest.

Sometimes it's the simplest stories that engage us the most. Michael Healey's *The Drawer Boy* is one such story. More than an amusing representation of city boy meets *Green Acres*, the Willamette Repertory Theatre's production is a tale about love, loss and an intimate friendship rarely seen between men.

The play is based on a 1972 project conducted by a group of Toronto-based actors. They lived and labored in an Ontario farming community and collected stories from the people they encountered. According to Director Kirk Boyd, *Drawer Boy* was the most-produced play in the country the last few years.

puts in a powerful performance as Morgan, encapsulating the essence of the rural farmer. A proud and protective man, he hides his emotions behind a tough veneer, while exposing his sensitivity through storytelling.

Achilles Massahos is adorably childlike as the impaired Angus. Because Angus only remembers *now*, Massahos uses his wonderful range of facial expressions and body movements to express Angus' rollercoaster of emotions. His ability to make us laugh at one moment then tug at our heartstrings the next is stunning.

Cameron Carlisle holds his own as Miles, nailing the earnest, yet carefree tie-dyed

...tender, moving and funny...

It's 1972 and elderly friends Morgan and Angus have shared a secluded life of ritual and routine on their farm for many years. Morgan does most of the demanding work while tending to the needs of Angus, who suffers from short- and long-term memory loss — the result of a head injury sustained during WWII.

All that changes when Miles, an enthusiastic young actor and playwright from the city arrives. Researching farm life for his theater group, Miles hopes to collect fodder for use on the stage. What he doesn't anticipate is becoming a part of the drama he seeks.

The action takes place in a simple, folksy kitchen with a door leading out to a front porch. Farm sounds including cows mooing, chickens clucking and Miles' vocal struggles with the tractor and hay baler emanate from behind the stage. A breathtakingly realistic backdrop of cloud-filled sky reflects subtle changes in light and depth as dawn turns to dusk on the farm.

At first, Morgan isn't thrilled about the interruption in their lives. But he makes the best of it with a touch of wry humor, toying with the young thespian via heartbreaking stories about the plight of farm cows and through a litany of sham chores such as washing individual pieces of gravel and shoveling manure in the barn with a table fork.

Boyd has assembled a truly inspired cast for this quality production. Wesley Bishop

spirit of his character. Through his interactions with Morgan and Angus, he reveals a sense of both the actor acting and the real person within.

As he adjusts to farm life, Miles discovers that interactions with Angus are difficult at best. Because Angus cannot remember from one day to the next, Miles must reintroduce himself each day. He quickly discovers that questioning Angus about his lost memories pushes him completely over the edge.

One evening, Miles overhears the two men talking on the porch. "Tell it," says Angus. Recited like a favorite poem from one who has delivered it many times over, Morgan tells Angus a story about two friends, the farmer and the drawer boy (pronounced draw-er, because the boy likes to draw); and two girls, one tall and the other taller. He tells of counting stars and talking all night; two houses together, but separate; a double wedding; and a tragic loss.

Against Morgan's wishes, Miles turns his story into a play. Seeing himself and Morgan portrayed onstage lights a spark in Angus. As he begins to regain his memory, the layers of hidden deception, secrets and truth slowly unfold.

Despite the play's confusing name, Willamette Rep's production of *The Drawer Boy* is tender, moving, and funny — richly woven storytelling at its finest. This truly exceptional production runs until Feb. 13 at the Hult Center's Soreng Theater. **ew**

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