



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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DRIVING MISS DAISY

John Frost

Her Majesty's Theatre
Until 2 June 2013

Review by Jamie Wright

Alfred Uhry's "Driving Miss Daisy" is chiefly about the unlikely friendship between an elderly Jewish widow and her black chauffeur in the post-WWII Georgia, but it's more than just a heartwarming tale of against-the-odds bonding - there's a strong undercurrent of social commentary as Miss Daisy's (and, by extension the south's; this is also illustrated via other events in the play) views on race relations change over the 25-year period the play encompasses.

And yes, this particular production of the play does star Angela Lansbury and James Earl Jones.

It's important to note that, on the off-chance that there are those who are unaware, Angela Lansbury and James Earl Jones are not simply film and television stars and the voices of beloved Disney film characters, *per se*; both are multi-award-winning stage actors, each with over half a century of experience portraying some of the most iconic characters in theatre.

The performances from all three – it's also important to point out that Daisy's son Boolie is played by Boyd Gaines; while he's not a household name the same way the other two are, he's an acclaimed stage actor who's won four Tony awards and three Drama Desk awards – are nothing short of exceptional in every scene.

James Earl Jones isn't just doing his trademark bass delivery; his accent – the very specific 'black southern' of the period – is perfect, and a key aspect of his character; he also affects a great physicality as Hoke as he ages. Similarly, Angela Lansbury delivers a masterclass in the use of facial expressions and comic timing; there's a scene where she does her impression of James Earl Jones' voice – with expressions to match – and it's pure magic. Boyd Gaines is unbowed by the fact he's sharing the stage with such giants, and more than holds his own; his Boolie is both hilarious and deeply sincere.

Director David Esbjornson has done a tremendous job of balancing all of the elements in this production, and the result is a superb theatrical experience; both tender and hilarious at the appropriate points. While the story is a gentle one, it moves at a lightning pace and the 25-year timeframe and how the characters age accordingly is reflected in subtle changes throughout.

The technical aspects are as subtle and seamless as you'd expect for a production of this magnitude, and the a simple set and the use of projection (e.g. subtle window effects for Daisy's house and Boolie's office, a picture of the grocery store) allows for rapid scene changes.

It is, simply put, an absolute triumph; a rare opportunity for Australians to see these two legends perform live and experience this wonderful, significant play performed so very well.