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Evensong

By Loria Parker

In a time and society that worships youth, it's encouraging to see a theatrical piece that reveals and reveres adults. The Broad Horizon Theatre Company presentation of Mary Gage's new play, ***Evensong***, is such an event. Based on interviews with seniors over the age of 80, living in Michigan, this lyrical sort of *Our Town*, comes to life with the stories of 6 people, 4 women and 2 men, that are the enriched human fabric that is America. Ms. Gage, with the help of director, Lewis Magruder, and six exceptional actors, has created an evening of theatre that is unmistakably fine.

The content of the play visits, mostly through monologues, various incidents in the character's lives, starting with the oldest, Gwen (Lucille Patton) 101 years old, telling of her childhood polio, and it's miraculous cure, her life on a sugar plantation in Jamaica and her eventual English boarding school education, falling in love, and move to Michigan. She is luminous and moves through her story with elegance and ease. Clay, (Donald Grody) gives life and heart to his portrayal of a farmer with a sad and neglected childhood. He captures perfectly the despair that stays with him for his entire life, never being able to reach his cold and punishing father. But he goes on to become a loving father and husband in quiet defiance of his own painful background.

Helen (Mikel Sarah Lambert) is wonderful as she describes her second banana sibling role in her family that fuels her passion for fashion, and ultimate college education and career. She conveys her life's twists and turns so beautifully and further engages the audience into the world on the stage. Sue (Pat Nesbit) tells of her difficult beginning with a drunken abusive father, and her determination and strength that ultimately protects her and her cowering mother. But as history often does, her own marriage is a repeat performance of her original family, and once again she must rise up against her husband, to save herself. And that evolution in her life experience is played out in a subtle yet powerful performance. Marie (Mary Ellen Ashley) is the European born immigrant whose attitude, through so many hardships and personal tragedies, somehow prevails. Having lost her first two "blue" babies, and rejecting her young, bewildered and heartbroken husband, somehow they go on, and finally have a healthy baby, followed by twelve more! Her family is her mission and she wears the role with humor, dignity and pride. Duke (Arthur French) rounds out the cast with yet another viewpoint, as an African American in the early twentieth century. He has dreams and goals and is determined to make a meaningful contribution of his life, and to his community. As he learns the ways of the world, and who you can really trust, he attains the life stature he desires. His performance has a childlike innocence and honesty that's irresistible.

This ensemble is a dream cast for this piece, and one feels throughout the play, that they are really the people they're portraying. It is theatre at it's best. In no small part this production has been handled with great affection by director, Lewis Magruder. His choice to have gentle music throughout the play works beautifully in the capable hands of pianist Marina Gabunia Verriest. The music is a cleanly woven combination of familiar pieces and original music by Larry Spivack. Thom Weaver's lighting design and Emily Pepper's costumes work perfectly for the play.

May Gage's ***Evensong***, is a play worthy of a longer run and a wider audience, and with a little luck, perhaps it will get what it truly deserves.

Evensong runs at the TBG Arts Center, Main Stage, 312 West 36th Street, New York NY 10018

August 10-August 27th ***Evensong*** plays Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings at 8 p.m., with Sunday matinees at 3 p.m. Tickets are \$18 and are available online at www.TheaterMania.com or by calling 212-352-3101. Tickets may also be purchased in-person at the box office, 30 minutes before curtain.