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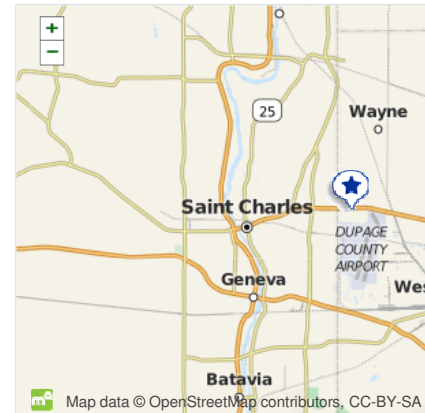
ARTS, OPINION

'Leaving Iowa' Pleases with Warmhearted Humor

A solid production by Fox Valley Repertory at Pheasant Run Mainstage

By Tom Witom February 5, 2011

"Leaving Iowa," performed at Pheasant Run Resort by Fox Valley Repertory (<http://www.foxvalleyrep.org/>), formerly known as Noble Fool Theatricals, carries the tagline: "the comedy about family vacations." But it's much more than that.



This warmhearted, sentimental and nostalgic show delights with full-bore humor, witty dialogue and a six-member cast of depicting genuine situations and real characters with whom it's easy to identify. The play was written by Chicago standup comics Tim Clue and Spike Manton, who were among those attending the opening-night performance on Jan. 29.

The first scene unfolds in flashback and introduces the principal players as they travel in the family station wagon in the middle of nowhere. At the wheel is weary Dad (Don Forston), who's lost and nodding off but would be the last to admit it. Mom (Diane Dorsey), the peacekeeper, sits alongside him, longing to spot a mile marker in order to get her bearings.

In the back are their young, restless children, Sis (Katherine Banks) and Don (Alex Goodrich), whose favorite pastimes are squabbling with one another and whining at their parents. No fight choreographer is listed in the program, but obviously the skirmishes between the two siblings are well orchestrated.

Fast forward to the present. Don, now a middle-aged journalist working in Boston, has returned to the family nest in Iowa. The main purpose of the visit is to scatter the ashes of his late father. However, that undertaking proves more challenging than anticipated when the original site for the intended dispersal, the place where Dad grew up, has undergone an unfortunate transformation into a parking lot for a new supermarket.

Don suddenly finds himself on a journey of self-discovery. He wants to do right by the father he once slighted and now regrets that "we didn't talk more."

As the final resting place for his father's remains Don eventually settles on a remote corner of Lebanon, Kan.—the geographic center of the United States—a place Dad always had wanted to visit.

But before that, Don relives a long-ago road trip taken by the family to Hannibal, Mo., which trumped the kids' vote for the Wisconsin Dells. It was a bust, but inspired fond memories such as how his father, a history teacher, would become excited at the sight of a historic road marker, or how Dad would become apoplectic when stuck behind a road-hogging, slow-moving trailer and execute some hair-raising passing maneuvers—wonderfully enacted by the cast and nicely complemented by Mike Tutaj's video projections in the background.

One of the funniest scenes shows the young siblings in a determined battle of wills trying to talk their resistant father into making a detour to an over-hyped tourist attraction.

Meanwhile, two other indispensable members in director Rachel Rockwell's seasoned ensemble, Sean Patrick Fawcett and Valerie Glowinski, appear in too many scenes to count, each time as different, laugh-inducing kooky characters, from auto mechanics to diner wait staff.

"Leaving Iowa" delivers a good night at the theater for the entire family. Put it on your list.

'Leaving Iowa' – Through March 13 by Fox Valley Repertory at Pheasant Run Resort Mainstage, 4051 E. Main St., St. Charles. \$29-\$39. Box office: (630) 584-6342 or visit (<http://www.foxvalleyrep.org/>) for information.

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COMMENTS (1)

wendy lee

8:35am on Sunday, February 6, 2011

Saw this little show at Second City some years ago after the loss of both parents so it brought back many memories of Iowa and our own treks as a family of 7 to Hannibal MO and other places in the play - avoiding the tourist traps along the way in favor of something educational. No one should mistake this as a play about Iowa...it's about any family in any state where one member moves away and is then called upon to "do the right thing" with the parents and their stuff be it ashes or personal possessions.