

Father-son relationship explored in comedy

A middle-aged writer searches for the perfect spot to scatter his father's ashes in *Leaving Iowa*.

Guest director Tony Caselli will stage Otterbein College Theatre's area premiere of Tim Clue's wistful comedy, opening tonight in the Campus Center Theatre.

"I love the father-son relationship," Caselli said.

"Funny and sweet, it's very much a memory play about a father and son who didn't get along for a while."

After living and working in Boston, Don returns to his Midwest home when his father dies.

"But when he gets there, he doesn't know what to do," Caselli said. "It doesn't feel right. So he takes a little road trip to spread his father's ashes. . . . He realizes that life is not about where you go or what you did but the journey."

About half of the two-act play, which alternates between the past and present, focuses on the last big vacation that the family took during the son's childhood.

"Those scenes resonate," Caselli said. "How much would any of us give to take just one more of those trips with our family? What would I give, knowing what I know now, to spend another hour or day with my family?"

Caselli also directed the 2004 world premiere at the Purple Rose Theatre in Chelsea, Mich. Designer Dana White, an Otterbein graduate who lighted the Michigan premiere, will also light Otterbein's production.

Clue is a Chicago playwright



MICHAEL GROSSBERG



SHARI L. LEWIS | DISPATCH

Director Tony Caselli, center, with cast members, from left: Daniel Everidge, Geneva Hyman, Beth Triffon and Zach Kleinsmith in Otterbein College Theatre's production of *Leaving Iowa*

and stand-up comedian who grew up in the Midwest.

"Tim did a great job of balancing all these sensitive emotions without getting overly sentimental or Hallmark-y," Caselli said. "We all hit a point in our lives when we suddenly look back and realize all the things your parents actually did for you — and you wonder whether you deserve that now."

"Maybe it's a very Midwest thing, but there's a feeling among a lot of people who grow up here that the real world happens somewhere else. When Don comes back, he realizes that the world is whatever you make it."

Performances will be at 7:30

tonight, 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 2 p.m. Sunday — and 8 p.m. May 4-6 — in the Campus Center Theatre, 100 W. Home St., Westerville. Tickets cost \$15. Call 614-823-1209.

USO Canteen show

Senior Repertory of Ohio Theatre Company will celebrate the 65th anniversary of the USO by parading the Stars and Stripes in a new revue.

SRO Stars and Stripes Canteen, opening Friday at Broad Street United Methodist Church, was conceived by Artistic Director Nancy Nocks as a musical tribute to United

Service Organizations entertainers and the soldiers whose spirits were lifted by their shows.

"The USO's 65th anniversary is a wonderful time to pay tribute to all the military men and women and what they did to put their lives on hold and sacrifice for our country," Nocks said.

She is music director of the two-act show, with her husband, Ron, as the director.

Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy, Sincerely, I Wish You Love, Crazy and Fly Me to the Moon are among the vintage songs to be performed by the Nockses, Bev Pettit, Karen Clark

Carpenter, Ruth Fullen, Eileen Howard, Bob Kellogg and Greg Patterson.

The company chose Kellogg Hall, the church gym, as the performance site because the space was used as a USO canteen during World War II.

Like a typical USO show, Senior Rep's production will offer free coffee and doughnuts — plus an area for dancing.

"The revue is a reflection on what a USO canteen might have been like," Pettit said.

She knows, having performed in a tour in the 1960s.

"The guys were homesick and just thrilled to have us," she said.

Under the direction of George Crepeau, an Ohio State University professor, Pettit and 13 other performers toured for four weeks in 1966 in Greenland, Iceland, Labrador and Newfoundland.

Depending on the size of the performing space, the group alternated between a cabaret show and the Broadway musical *Stop the World, I Want To Get Off*.

SRO Stars and Stripes Canteen will be presented at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 2 p.m. Sunday — and 10:30 a.m. and 8 p.m. May 19, 8 p.m. May 20 and 2 p.m. May 21 — in the church's Kellogg Hall, 501 E. Broad St. A discount preview will be at 10:30 this morning.

Tickets cost \$20, or \$17 for senior citizens and \$10 for students; or \$50 for Saturday's show, including a dinner and silent auction. Call 614-258-9495 or visit www.sro-theatre.org.

Michael Grossberg is Dispatch theater critic.

mgrossberg@dispatch.com

Otterbein troupe logs some hilarious mileage

By Michael Grossberg

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Leaving Iowa is a moving drama. Plus, it really moves.

Tim Clue's affecting memory piece, in its central Ohio debut at Otterbein College, also ranks as one of the funniest and most imaginative plays of the season.

The winning Otterbein College Theatre production, which opened last night in the Campus Center Theatre, exploits the play's deceptively simple structure for maximum humor and humanity.

Like Otterbein's summer production of *Rounding Third*, a similarly charming stunt piece, *Leaving Iowa* mines the fertile and familiar territory of parenthood and childhood.

Everyone at Wednesday's student preview laughed uproariously; Clue hits the bull's-eye by appealing to an audience of teenagers to baby boomers.

Guest director Tony Caselli elicits nuanced performances from the fine six-character cast.

All the student actors are good, but Zach Kleinsmith is consistently convincing in the trickiest role, which requires him to make the most frequent and emotional shifts between

► Otterbein College Theatre will present *Leaving Iowa* at 8 tonight and Saturday night, and 2 p.m. Sunday — and 8 p.m. Thursday through May 6 — in the Campus Center Theatre, 100 W. Home St., Westerville. Tickets cost \$15. Call 614-823-1209.

adolescence and adulthood.

Kleinsmith plays Don, who returns home to Iowa for a family visit after his father's death. His solitary drive to spread his father's ashes gets waylaid by comic and serendipitous circumstances as well as amusing memories of annual car trips.

The chemistry between his character and the exasperating older "Sis" (Beth Triffon) is hilarious and authentic.

Daniel Everidge is sympathetic and amusing as Dad, even as he explores his character's controlling rigidity.

As Mom, Geneva Hyman is funny, warm and sad. Her performance hints at the character's unfulfilled life, only implied in the text.

As the "Super Utility Players," Luke Dixon and Lilian Matsuda are super in multiple roles that flesh out the Midwestern landscapes and roadside oddities.

College productions sometimes fail to surmount the challenge of making student actors convincing as older adults, but that's no problem here. Beyond the top-notch casting and acting, the playful script makes such leaps of faith part of the journey.

Corinne Betz's scenic design — four wooden stools suggesting the front and back seats of the family car, backed by an abstract Midwestern landscape — leaves room for characters

and imagination to roam.

Scene changes and time shifts are neatly handled by Dana White's mercurial lighting along with Ruth Boyd's plain period costumes and Quintessa Gallinat's evocative sound design.

Although the script occasionally indulges in sentimentality and sometimes veers close to caricature, *Leaving Iowa* leaves theatergoers amply rewarded.

mgrossberg@dispatch.com

Theatre

GERMAN VILLAGE GAZETTE

COLUMBUS, OH

W-CIRC. 4,265

MAY-04-2006

Memory play revisits lead character's childhood — and ours

By DENNIS THOMPSON

Suburban News Theater Critic

389
Otterbein College Theatre does a marvelous job with a wondrous gem of a play.

Tim Clue's *Leaving Iowa* is a melding of seeming opposites. It's simple, yet theatrical; funny, yet moving; odd, yet familiar.

It's a memory play in which we get to see the memories. It's a travel play in which the characters travel both physically and emotionally.

And while it seems to be aimed at the generation that grew up in the simpler, station-wagon-vacation days of the '60s and '70s, it hits themes of family, love, guilt and responsibility that are timeless.

Don, a journalist from Boston, has returned home to Iowa to visit his mother and sister.

While there, he takes on the task of burying his father's ashes, which have been in the basement for three years.

As this journey takes unexpected turns, he remembers his childhood, especially family vacations on which we, too, come along.

These are characters who are at once unique and familiar.

Dad, a history teacher, seeks out minutiae that are of interest only to him and tries to share them with his family, barely aware that his children are bored.

The children love their parents, fight in the back seat and wish the family vacations were more exciting, yet they will remember them always.

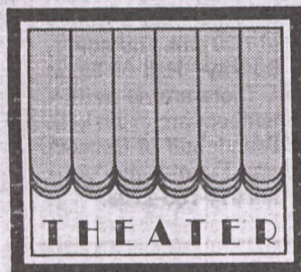
The mom goes along with the father most of the time, yet when she doesn't, he knows better than to cross her.

These are vacations to the exciting mecca of Hannibal, Mo., of family votes, of Mom correcting grammar, of Dad checking the mileage.

This is Don's play, and Zach Kleinsmith subtly and instantly switches between young boy and young man. He's the wide-eyed, eager boy and the centered, determined man with touches of both whimsy and guilt.

Kleinsmith is an actor who creates likable characters, and we enjoy accompanying him on this journey.

Beth Triffon also jumps easily from child to adult as Sis. Don and Sis' scenes



REVIEW

ring true to anyone who ever had a sibling.

Geneva Hyman shows the practiced patience of Mom, walking the fine line between deferring to her husband and knowing when and how to step in.

Daniel Everidge combines infectious enthusiasm with kindly, yet stern, old-school qualities as Dad.

Luke Dixon and Lilian Matsuda play a myriad of characters — everyone else the family encounters during the play. They bring individuality to each one.

Guest director Tony Caselli seamlessly blends the flashbacks with the present.

The switches happen so quickly and so often, and often only for a moment, that a lesser director might

have left us confused. But we always know where we are.

He's aided by the subtleties of Dana L. White's lighting design and the clarity of Quinessa Gallinat's sound design, thanks to which the car horns seem real and the whooshing of passing billboards seems magical.

Corinne Betz's set design is simple, but that's what's called for. All this is brought to us with a plain background and wooden stools. Yet we are taken so far.

This is a wonderful play, stunning in the simplicity of its theatricality. It is laugh-out-loud humor, nodding-in-memory melancholy, bring-to-tears sentimentality.

I should admit that one reason this work affected me so was because the family vacations had elements from my childhood and I buried my father only four months ago.

One moment I'm remembering fighting with my sister in the back seat, the next I'm remembering standing with her in a funeral home.

But I think I would have felt strongly about this regardless of when I saw it.

For all of us, we're either

there now, have been there or will be.

Otterbein College Theatre's *Leaving Iowa* continues at 8 p.m. Thursday

through Saturday at the Campus Center Theatre, 100 W. Home St., Westerville. Tickets are \$15. For reservations call 614-823-1109.

OTHER PAPER
COLUMBUS, OH
M-CIRC. 50,000

MAY-04-2006

Lampooning vacations, but with surprising warmth

389

A play can be like a Rorschach test: How you react to it says as much about you as it does about the play itself.

Thus, some will be pleasantly amused by Tim Clue's **Leaving Iowa** while others will be profoundly moved. Either way, they're winners.

Personally, I fall into the former category even though plays about fathers and sons normally reduce me to tears. I admit my eyes got a little wet near the end, but that says as much about the Otterbein production's canny use of background music as it does about Clue's words.

Having had a distant father who preferred to sit out family vacations, I couldn't relate to the father in this memory play. Known simply as Dad, the character eagerly organizes and leads annual trips that, unfortunately, tend to be more instructional than fun.

Dad is fascinated by American history. Trouble is, as son Don later remarks, he's fascinated by the most boring details of history.

He drags Mom, Sis and Don to old cemeteries and Mark Twain's hometown when the kids would rather go to the Wisconsin Dells or to their grandparents' house, home of the world's largest Rice Krispie treats.



Any idea where should I put these ashes?
Zach Kleinsmith (front) and Daniel Everidge in Otterbein College Theatre's Leaving Iowa

Years later, Don remembers the resulting hours of boredom—and surprising moments of familial warmth—as he undertakes a difficult mission. Wracked with guilty feelings that he didn't appreciate his

father enough when he was alive, Don tries to find the perfect final resting place for Dad's ashes.

Clue's play jumps back-and-forth between Don's present-day quest and a long-ago family trip. In Otterbein's production, guest director Tony Caselli handles the switches effortlessly with help from lighting designer Dana White.

Set designer Corinne Betz stays out of the way by allowing a nearly bare stage and four stools to stand in for the family station wagon and large portions of the Midwest. Sound designer Quintessa Gallinat supplies enough aural details to fill in the gaps.

The cast does its part by creating strong characters and relationships, adding or subtracting years as needed.

Most fun is the tempestuous relationship between Don and the older Sis, who seems capable of committing all manner of mischief while flying under the parents' radar. Beth Triffon is a ball to watch as the Teflon-coated sibling.

Most subtle is the relationship between the benignly dictatorial Dad and Mom, who backs him up as long as he doesn't get too carried away. Geneva Hyman's face registers an intriguing succession of emotions as the loyal wife.

Theater

RICHARD ADES



Zach Kleinsmith is a likable narrator and central character as Don; Daniel Everidge manages to do annoying things without being annoying as Dad. Luke Dixon and Lilian Matsuda play a variety of supporting characters without ever repeating themselves, portrayal-wise.

Great ensemble work makes this a funny look at the old American tradition of the family road trip. If you remember such trips, you may be moved as well as amused.

INFO:

Otterbein College Theatre will present *Leaving Iowa* at 8 p.m. today through Saturday at the Campus Center Theatre, 100 W. Home St. in Westerville. Running time: 2 hours, 5 minutes (including intermission). Tickets are \$15. 823-1209.

'Leaving Iowa' plugs into universal memories

By DENNIS THOMPSON

Suburban News Theater Critic

Otterbein College Theatre does a marvelous job with a wondrous gem of a play.

Tim Clue's *Leaving Iowa* is a melding of seeming opposites. It's simple, yet theatrical; funny, yet moving; odd, yet familiar.

It's a memory play in which we get to see the memories. It's a travel play in which the characters travel

both physically and emotionally.

And while it seems to be aimed at the generation that grew up in the simpler, station-wagon-vacation days of the '60s and '70s, it hits themes of family, love, guilt and responsibility that are timeless.

Don, a journalist from Boston, has returned home to Iowa to visit his mother and sister.

While there, he takes on

the task of burying his father's ashes, which have been in the basement for three years.

As this journey takes unexpected turns, he remembers his childhood, especially family vacations on which we, too, come along.

These are characters who are at once unique and familiar.

Dad, a history teacher, seeks out minutiae that are of interest only to him and tries to share them with his family, barely aware that his children are bored.

The children love their parents, fight in the back seat and wish the family vacations were more exciting, yet they will remember them always.

The mom goes along with the father most of the time, yet when she doesn't, he knows better than to cross her.

These are vacations to the exciting mecca of Hannibal, Mo., of family votes, of Mom correcting grammar, of Dad checking the mileage.

This is Don's play, and Zach Kleinsmith subtly and instantly switches between young boy and young man. He's the wide-eyed, eager boy and the centered, determined man with touches of both whimsy and guilt.

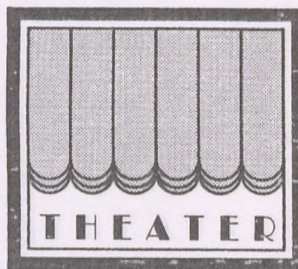
Kleinsmith is an actor who creates likable characters, and we enjoy accompanying him on this journey.

Beth Triffon also jumps easily from child to adult as Sis. Don and Sis' scenes ring true to anyone who ever had a sibling.

Geneva Hyman shows the practiced patience of Mom, walking the fine line between deferring to her husband and knowing when and how to step in.

Daniel Everidge combines infectious enthusiasm with kindly, yet stern, old-school qualities as Dad.

Luke Dixon and Lilian Matsuda play a myriad of characters — everyone else the family encounters during the play. They bring individuali-



REVIEW

ty to each one.

Guest director Tony Caselli seamlessly blends the flashbacks with the present.

The switches happen so quickly and so often, and often only for a moment, that a lesser director might have left us confused. But we always know where we are.

He's aided by the subtleties of Dana L. White's lighting design and the clarity of Quinessa Gallinat's sound design, thanks to which the car horns seem real and the whooshing of passing billboards seems magical.

Corinne Betz's set design is simple, but that's what's called for. All this is brought to us with a plain background and wooden stools. Yet we are taken so far.

This is a wonderful play, stunning in the simplicity of its theatricality. It is laugh-out-loud humor, nodding-in-memory melancholy, bring-to-tears sentimentality.

I should admit that one reason this work affected me so was because the family vaca-

See **PLAY**, Page 5B



Chorus spring production

The Worthington Chorus will present its 29th annual spring production, "An Evening With Rodgers & Hammerstein," at 8 p.m. May 12 and 13, and 2:30 p.m. May 14 at Thomas Worthington High School, 300 W. Granville Road. Chorus members include Westerville area residents (from left): Barbara Damiano, Robyn Purje, Tim Brewer and Janet O'Brien, accompanist. Advance tickets are \$8, \$6 for students and seniors, and can be purchased from any chorus member or by calling 614-885-5315. Tickets will be \$10 at the door. Children age 10 and younger will be admitted free.

ARTS BRIEFS

Events focus on Bowles' contribution

Otterbein College's department of music will host a Paul A. Bowles Retrospective Saturday through Tuesday.

A lecture and film presentation on the composer and author is set for 3 p.m. Thursday in Riley Auditorium of the Battelle Fine Arts Center, 170 W. Park St.

Two concerts of Bowles' music will be performed by college faculty and students at 8 p.m. Monday and Tuesday, also in Riley Auditorium.

Admission to all events is free and open to the public.

For more information call 614-823-1358.

ARTS BRIEFS

Otterbein acting alumni recognized

Graduates of Otterbein College recently have been recognized for their on-screen acting accomplishments.

Billoah Greene was awarded a Best Actor prize at the American Black Film Festival for his portrayal of Teshawn Tucker in the independent film *Preaching to the Choir*. The film won the Jury Prize for Best Feature Film at festival.

Greene previously won Best Supporting Actor at the Poconos Film Festival for his role in the independent film *Peoples* (2004), which also received a Best Feature nomination at the Beverly Hills Film Festival.

On television Greene has appeared in episodes of *Cold Case*, *ER*, *Third Watch* and *Jonny Zero*. He currently teaches acting and communications to elementary school children in after-school drama programs in the Los Angeles area.

Mandy Bruno, a 2003 graduate of Otterbein, has been nominated for a Daytime Emmy in the Outstanding Younger Actress in a Drama Series category for her work as Marina Cooper on *Guiding Light*.

Bruno was in her senior year when she was hired for the role, having earned an audition during the annual Otterbein Senior Showcase performance in New York City. While at

Otterbein, she also performed in *A Secret Garden*, *The Mikado*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *The Sanders Family Christmas* and *Blithe Spirit*.

PLAY

Continued from Page 3B

tions had elements from my childhood and I buried my father only four months ago.

One moment I'm remembering fighting with my sister in the back seat, the next I'm remembering standing with her in a funeral home.

But I think I would have felt strongly about this regardless of when I saw it.

For all of us, we're either there now, have been there or will be.

Otterbein College The-

atre's *Leaving Iowa* continues at 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday at the Campus Center Theatre, 100 W. Home St., Westerville. Tickets are \$15. For reservations call 614-823-1109.

Ensembles to take the stage at college

Otterbein College will host the Classical Guitar Ensemble of the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music at 8 p.m. Thursday in Riley Auditorium of the Battelle Fine Arts Center, 170 W. Park St.

The program features music by Praetorius, Mendelssohn, Roux, Almeida, Bach, Margola and York. The *Jamaican Rumba* by Arthur Benjamin concludes the concert.

Otterbein's Percussion Ensemble will present its spring recital at 8 p.m. next Wednesday in Riley Auditorium.

The programs are free and open to the public. For more information call 614-823-1358.