



SILVER-HAIRED ROSE OF TEXAS: Holland Taylor as Governor Ann Richards in *Ann*. Photo: Ave Bonar



Theater Review

Holland Taylor brings iconic *Ann* to life

ANN

Written by Holland Taylor

Directed by Benjamin Endsley Klein

Vivian Beaumont Theater

150 West 65th Street

(212-239-6200), <http://www.theannrichardsplay.com>

By Scott Harrah

Holland Taylor channels the late Texas Governor Ann Richards with mostly entertaining results in the one-woman Broadway bio-drama, *Ann*. Ms. Taylor, of TV's "Two and a Half Men" fame, is not just the star of the show; she also wrote the script. Richards was noteworthy for being the first Democratic woman governor of traditionally Republican Texas, but there is much more to her life story than simply being a brassy blue leader in a red state.

One-person shows are always tricky territory, particularly in a big Broadway theater, but Ms. Taylor brilliantly paints a riveting portrait of the steel magnolia best known outside the Lone Star State for giving the keynote speech at the 1998 Democratic National Convention. However, Taylor's portrayal is more than a biography of a groundbreaking woman.

Using a witty monologue full of down-home spirit, Ms. Taylor, sporting a silver beehive, shows exactly how Governor Richards was a salty old Texas broad with a lot of guts and not some bleeding heart. The governor was a Southern good ole gal, a divorcee and a feminist, but also a mother and grandmother who would telephone her kids and curse them out with the same spunk she used to keep everyone from

local Texas officials and Catholic leaders to President Bill Clinton in line.

Act One opens with Governor Richards giving a commencement speech at an imaginary Texas university. Michael Fagin's clever set later morphs into the governor's office in Austin in the early 1990s; and, eventually, her New York City outpost in the New Millennium, long after George W. Bush squashed her shot at a second term.

One-person monologues are best done in one act to keep them from losing dramaturgical momentum, so it is puzzling why a more experienced Broadway director was not chosen to helm this project. Director Benjamin Endsley Klein does little to pare down unnecessary filler that often bogs down the show's narrative. Presented with two acts and an intermission in between, *Ann* loses steam at times, and there are far too many references to various Texas leaders that, well, only Texans will appreciate.

Ms. Taylor truly lets this chronicle of a Lone Star great shine when she tells amusing anecdotes about Bill Clinton and other well-known luminaries the governor dealt with throughout her political career. From the infectious laugh and Texas twang to the hyperactive movements, Ms. Taylor nails every aspect of Governor Richards' colorful persona. The offstage voice of Julie White (*The Little Dog Laughed*), as the governor's quick-witted assistant, provides many laughs.

Governor Richards died of esophageal cancer in 2006, and Ms. Taylor was reportedly so grief-stricken upon hearing news of the woman's death that she decided to write this play. *Ann* is a marvelous paean to the governor, but one leaves the Vivian Beaumont Theater wondering how much more powerful this show might be with a little polish and trimming of textual fat. Still, there's enough funny material here to please most theatergoers, regardless of political affiliation.

Edited by Scott Harrah

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