



OSCAR WINNER OLYMPIA DUKAKIS 'MILKS' WILLIAMS' CLASSIC WITH DRAMATIC APLOMB: (left to right) Maggie Lacey, Darren Pettie & Olympia Dukakis in Roundabout's Off-Broadway revival of *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*. Photo: Joan Marcus

Theater Review

Olympia Dukakis ambitious in rare revival of Tennessee Williams' *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*



The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore

By Tennessee Williams

Directed by Michael Wilson

Through April 3, 2011

Laura Pels Theatre at the Harold and Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre

111 West 46th Street

212-719-1300, www.roundabouttheatre.org

By Scott Harrah

This rarely revived drama—first mounted on Broadway in 1963, and again in 1964 with Tallulah Bankhead and Tab Hunter— is not one of Tennessee Williams' greatest works, but it certainly has merit, and is worth revisiting if only to savor the playwright's poetic dialogue. Oscar winner Olympia Dukakis is an odd choice for the lead role of Flora Goforth, a wealthy American widow from Georgia living in Italy, primarily because many will make comparisons to the actress' iconic role as another Southern lady, Clairee Belcher in the 1989 film, *Steel Magnolias*. Regardless, Flora—or "Sissy" as she is often called—is a difficult role for any actress, and although it takes a few scenes for us to truly get into Ms. Dukakis' interpretation, she ultimately delivers a multi-dimensional portrait of a troubled woman in a play that relies heavily on the late Mr. Williams' recurrent theme of tragic heroines with a penchant for florid language to vent the frustration of unfulfilled dreams. As written by Mr. Williams, Flora has familiar shades of characters from the author's more successful plays, so even attempting to play the part is an instant challenge.

In *Milk Train*, the reclusive, ailing Flora is holed up in her secluded Italian estate and attempts to write her memoirs via dictation with the help of assistant Blackie (Maggie Lacey). When the mysterious figure Christopher Flanders (Darren Pettie)—purportedly a published poet—enters the picture, Flora is immediately attracted to and suspicious of him, and for good reason. He has endured the wrath of vicious dogs, wound his way through steep trails, all to enter Flora's remote territory.

Act one moves along at a rapid pace as we meet characters such as the Witch of Capri (Edward Hibbert), Flora's solitary friend who warns her about her young visitor's true intentions. Christopher is known for

being an “angel of death,” often helping elderly rich women nearing death through their final days. The rest of Flora’s entourage consists of staff help, all of whom cater to her needs as her health and mental state continue to disintegrate.

By act two, however, the story’s narrative snags ultimately take it nowhere, and it is easy to understand why the play never quite took off on Broadway, and why the film adaptation, *Boom* (with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton) was also a dud. So why revive the show, one might ask? For true Williams purists, *Milk Train* is noteworthy if only for the simple fact that it was the beginning of the end of his career as he descended into the trappings of his celebrity and alleged battle with alcohol and inner demons. It was, perhaps, Williams’ last truly accessible work before he failed miserably with consequent infamous flops such as *Out Cry* and *Vieux Carre*.

Director Michael Wilson certainly had his proverbial work cut out for him with this production. How does one bring to life, nearly 50 years later, a story that has failed before? Mr. Wilson offers a sense of ambitious admiration to *Milk Train*, despite its myriad shortcomings. Edward Hibbert brings his usual razor-sharp sense of comic timing, adding much-needed levity in the right places. Maggie Lacey delivers her lines with the requisite spunk needed to match Flora’s wit. Darren Pettie, as Christopher, lacks the necessary sense of enigma and angelic innocence to truly make his character convincing. However, what really makes this production so important for modern-day theater lovers is the chance to see and hear Tennessee Williams’ lyrical, textured language delivered on the stage in the 21st century. Nobody has ever written for the theater in the inimitable style that Mr. Williams did, and no one likely ever will again.

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