

Living

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U-Rock Theatre's 'Picnic' is an artful revival of a classic play

By Naomi Levin

Contributing Writer

The U-Rock Player's production of William Inge's "Picnic" is an excellent presentation of a play that's difficult to cast. With few exceptions, and then arguable ones, the play is beautifully cast.

"Picnic" captures the yearnings of its characters poetically and so does the pacing, innuendo and sensitivity of Carolyn Haycraft's keen and insightful direction.

When the beautiful Madge Owens (played by Jamie Mathison) leaves her rich boyfriend Alan to run after the hunky, likable but shiftless Hal Carter (Nnanna Egbujiobi) a romantic setting for onlookers is satisfied. But whether their union will be fulfillment or fiasco is anyone's guess.

Similarly, when Rosemary, (who is excellently characterized by Kristen Iaquina) the local English teacher desperately fearful of old maidhood, begs and bullies the suitor, Howard (Kyle Adams) into converting their hapless affair into marriage, there's no sense of triumph.

Over all hangs the shadow of Flo Owens, (Lisa LaChance-Kirchner) whose husband is gone, and has had to raise Madge and her younger sister

Millie, (Callie Johnson) a tomboy with artistic leanings, all by her weary self.

Once a star college football player, Hal is a fraternity brother of Alan's and a drop out who dropped into drifting. He finds his way to Alan's hometown seeking a job which Allan warmly offers.

As things work out, Hal doesn't take the job but gets Madge, Allan's girl, leaving Allan shaken and angry. The same goes for Flo, who wanted her daughter to marry up, not down. Hal also brings sorrow to Millie, who gives up her tomboyish ways and puts on a dress for a date with him for the town's Labor Day picnic.

Mathison is a lovely looking Madge and gives a slow building implication-laden performance. Egbujiobi has the animal magnetism Hal requires, he brings to the role a sinewy presence that gradually scores. I would only mention that his accelerated, high energy performance, also lends toward a more rapid delivery of his lines, and the delivery is lost sometimes.

Iaquina is a magnificently desperate and stunning Rosemary. Callie Johnson, who plays Madge's younger sister Millie, handles the play's breezy comedy admirably, but

she also brings to it a level of torment. As the Owens's good-hearted neighbor, Helen Potts, Rita Lynes seems truly at home on the plains — a superb portrait of a warm human being who goes through life doing the right things for everyone else.

The play's humor and pathos plays well throughout. The entire cast, consistently get the most out of their lines. All contribute handsomely, but none more so than Matthew Kerr's marvelously atmospheric set and lyrical lighting. It is the first time I can say that the lighting actually worked so beautifully with the set as to give it a realness of dimension and great depth. The use of color through lighting was masterful.

U-Rock's "Picnic" may not have been as hopeless as William Inge would have liked, but it is nonetheless a terrifically compelling and entertaining evening of theater.

'Picnic' can be seen at 8 p.m. tonight and Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday, 8 p.m. Oct. 24-26, and 2 p.m. Oct. 27. Tickets are \$5 for general admission, \$3 for children 12 and younger. For more information or to purchase tickets, call the UW-Rock County Business Administration office at 758-6566.

Play review