



WARNER BROS.

Morgan Freeman and Jessica Tandy in *Driving Miss Daisy*.

★ ★ ★ *Driving Miss Daisy*

*Oaks 4 West*

One day, the elderly Miss Daisy (Jessica Tandy) accidentally backs her car over a small wall and into a neighbor's yard. Her son Boolie (Dan Aykroyd) realizes that she can no longer drive herself and insists on hiring a chauffeur.

His name is Hoke (Morgan Freeman). He is intelligent, polite and a good driver. He is also black. Now Miss Daisy doesn't have a prejudiced bone in her body. But she doesn't need a chauffeur and hates the idea of having a stranger in her house, someone who would talk behind her back and eat from her icebox.

Miss Daisy refuses to let Hoke do anything but sit around. Boolie is paying his salary, but as far as she's concerned, Hoke can just go away. He won't, and the core of *Driving Miss Daisy* depicts their changing relationship from master and servant to amiable com-

panions to best friends.

I say "master and servant" on purpose, because it's quite clear that Miss Daisy does have a few prejudiced bones in her body. Hoke changes her attitude, and in that role, Morgan Freeman gives one of the more difficult performances imaginable.

The movie is set in Atlanta before and during the civil rights movement. When we first meet Hoke, he defers to any white people present and is humble and polite. "Yes'm," he says quietly. "No, suh," he says humbly. In short, he seems to be the stereotypical black servant we're sadly familiar with from the movies.

But Hoke changes with the times, asserting his proper place more and more. Somehow, Freeman imbues him with a dignity and pride from the very beginning. There were people who spoke and behaved as Hoke did —

Freeman manages to make him warm, funny and human without ever sinking into Stepin Fetchit characterization.

Perhaps he succeeds because Hoke and Daisy are such compelling, individual characters. Freeman is certainly helped by the presence of Jessica Tandy. *Driving Miss Daisy* is as much about growing old as it is about prejudice, and Tandy shows Daisy aging and becoming senile with painful, wrenching honesty.

Unfortunately, the direction of Bruce Beresford is too flat and dull to add anything to the story other than soft-focus shots of Atlanta. And the script by Alfred Uhry, despite having won the Pulitzer Prize for the stage play it's based on, is a little too neat and tidy to be satisfactory.

Still, warmth, humor and two marvelous performances are more than most films can ever offer.

BY MICHAEL GILTZ