



FRONT PAGE	POLITICS	BUSINESS	MEDIA	ENTERTAINMENT	COMEDY	SPORTS	STYLE	WORLD	GREEN	FOOD	TRAVEL	TECH	
LIVING	HEALTH	DIVORCE	ARTS	BOOKS	RELIGION	IMPACT	EDUCATION	COLLEGE	NY	LA	CHICAGO	DENVER	BLOGS

LIVE UPDATES: Democratic Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords Shot, Federal Judge Killed [Get Breaking News by Email](#)



Michael Giltz
 Freelance writer and raconteur
 Posted: October 28, 2010 03:16 AM

BIO Get Email Alerts
 Become a Fan Bloggers' Index

Theater: "Driving Miss Daisy" Sputters, "Wings" Doesn't Soar

What's Your Reaction: Print

Inspiring Funny Hot Scary Outrageous Amazing Weird Crazy

Read More: [Alfred Uhry](#) , [Arthur Kopit](#) , [Boyd Gaines](#) , [Broadway](#) , [Driving Miss Daisy](#) , [James Earl Jones](#) , [Jan Maxwell](#) , [Morgan Freeman](#) , [Play](#) , [Second Stage Theatre](#) , [Vanessa Redgrave](#) , [Wings](#) , [Entertainment News](#)

SHARE THIS STORY

0	3 views	0	2

Get Entertainment Alerts

Email Comments 2

Enough cliches in that headline for you? Here are my impressions of two revivals: one Broadway and one Off.



DRIVING MISS DAISY ** out of ****
[Golden Theatre on Broadway](#)

When they announced a [Broadway revival for *Driving Miss Daisy*](#), my first reaction was, Why? Then I saw the cast: Boyd Gaines as the son, and Vanessa Redgrave and James Earl Jones in the leads. That's like bringing baseball's American League All Stars to a little league game. That may seem an unfair reaction to a Pulitzer Prize winning play that went on to score Academy Award for Best Picture (and three more, including Best Actress). So writer Alfred Uhry can take comfort in that when I say time hasn't been kind to the movie or the thin play that produced it. Like many theatergoers, I'd be happy to see this cast in anything that interested them, but I'm afraid even they can't bring much substance to the

ADVERTISEMENT

MOST POPULAR ON HUFFPOST

- Democratic Rep. Shot, Federal Judge Killed At Public Event**
Comments (9,610)
- Suspected Arizona Shooter Identified: Disturbing YouTube Videos, MySpace**
Comments (9,018)
- Camille Grammer's Porn Past Comes Back To Haunt Her**
Comments (1,031)
- Intestinal Parasites May Be Causing Your Energy Slump**
Comments (195)
- Should The Leader Of The Free World Dress Like THIS?**
Comments (579)
- What Not To Say When Your Loved One Is Upset**
Comments (307)
- GOP Congresswoman Caught In Sexually Suggestive Photos**
Comments (1,586)
- Thousands Of Birds Found Dead In Italy**
Comments (3,309)

show.

The story is simplicity itself: an elderly Jewish widow has grown too old to drive herself around and the widow's son hires a chauffeur named Hoke to do the job. She resists at first but they slowly gain a rapport from the 1940s into the 1970s as the civil rights movement swirls around them. Miss Daisy learns to see the world through his eyes (a little) and he learns to read (a little). By the end, Miss Daisy realizes that her driver is in fact her best friend and tells him so.

It's a landmine of a show really, with the role of the chauffeur (a very particular character from a very specific time and place, to be fair) fraught with the dangers of making decency and kindness seem like humility or just the black man knowing his place. Spike Lee was never going to direct the film version. I should step in here and talk about the dignity that Morgan Freeman in the original production and Jones here bring to it. But in fact it's not noble Sidney Poitierism the role needs but the humor and specificity both men deliver that rescues Hoke as much as possible.

Still, there's no overlooking the bald life lessons on display here. Quite simply the actors are underwhelmed by the material. Gaines makes no more of an impression here than Dan Ackroyd did in the film, which is more of a testament to the part than that actor's talent. Redgrave's accent may waver (sometimes it's Southern; mostly it's just Redgravian) but she slides flawlessly from elderly to frail. Jones also handles his part with aplomb -- how could he not? -- but there's too little clay for either of them to mold. Still, they do manage a moment at the end as Redgrave remains fiery and probing despite being reduced to helplessness. This pair is simply too good not to create some indelible moments.

Even though the show is in an intimate Broadway house, *Driving Miss Daisy* isn't helped by being a Broadway production. If there's one asset the original had, it was an Off Broadway house and the pleasure of seeing two actors work mostly with imagination. Here we get massive video displays on the back wall and a staircase that moves in and out to no purpose. Do we really need to see a giant Christmas tree projected on the wall to figure out it's the holidays?

Worst of all, the car scenes (originally, I assume, handled just by placing a bench and a chair on stage and letting the actors convince us they were in a car) are here brought to life by having the bench and chair spin around slowly, turning left and right and doing a gentle 360 degree turn as if we need to be prompted into understanding what is going on. So the very modest charm of what was essentially a two-hander (or rather, three-hander) is spoiled by even this mild jazzing up. That tells you how fragile the charm of *Driving Miss Daisy* was in the first place.

What others said:

Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* praises Redgrave and Jones in general as giants, of course. "They give responsible, intelligent performances that are infused with two old pros' joy in the mastery of their craft. And they pull off the deft trick of registering as big as we want them to be without making the play in which they appear seem even smaller than it is."

Joe Dziemianowicz of the *New York Daily News* said, "But even the one-two wallop of Vanessa Redgrave and James Earl Jones can't make Alfred Uhry's one-act more than it is - a wispy middle-of-the-road

PHOTOS: Raven-Symone's
Dramatic Weight Loss
Comments (532)

DON'T MISS HUFFPOST BLOGGERS ◀ 1 of 5 ▶



Alan Grayson
[Gabby Giffords: A Few Words](#)



Dylan Ratigan
[A Destructive Crossroads](#)

HOT TRENDS

[jwoww naked](#) [miley cyrus lap dance video](#) [natalie portman natalie portman pregnant](#) [snooki nude](#)

People.com



Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords In 'Very Critical Condition' After Shooting
[READ MORE ▶](#)



Kate Middleton Joins Future In-Laws at Weekend Wedding
[READ MORE ▶](#)



BUZZ: Are Zac Efron & Vanessa Hudgens Back On?
[READ MORE ▶](#)

[More Celebrity News at People.com](#)

Popeater



William and Kate's Love Story



There's No Viral Video Like 'Home'



Michelle Williams on Keeping Heath's Memory Alive

[More Celebrity News at Popeater.com](#)

TOP VIDEO PICKS ◀ 1 of 9 ▶

[Queen's Royal Wedding Rift](#)

family drama fueled by sentimentality."

Elisabeth Vincentelli of the *New York Post* said, "The whole point here is the leads, and they bask in the spotlight without ever appearing to hog it. The result isn't so much a clash of the titans as a delicate, respectful rubbing of elbows."

That ole softie John Simon of Bloomberg News raved, "With three great actors -- Vanessa Redgrave, James Earl Jones and Boyd Gaines -- at their apogee, the enchanting revival of "Driving Miss Daisy" is the best theater can be."

David Finkle of *Theatermania* said, "There's little doubt that Driving Miss Daisy is not just about a vehicle; it's a vehicle in the old theater sense. But when stars such as this trio dispense their charms and craft this well, audiences will be only too happy to go along for the ride."



WINGS ** out of ****

Second Stage Theatre

Unlike *Driving Miss Daisy*, this **Off Broadway revival of *Wings*** benefits from a sleek beautiful production that makes the most of the Second Stage space to bring this tone poem of a play to life. Written by Arthur Kopit, *Wings* seems like a story scripted by Oliver Sacks: a woman (Jan Maxwell) has suffered some traumatic injury and can barely decipher what is happening to her in the hospital. When she begins the road to recovery, this one-time aviatrix spends her days in group therapy with other patients who have trouble verbalizing the world around them. They need to be prompted for the word for virtually everything: elbow, the corner of the room, each other, themselves. It's exhausting and frustrating and -- it is hoped -- beautiful in how it reveals the way we see the world.

Caryl Churchill might have witty fun with this conceit. But this show exhausts us, with the first 10 or so minutes a barrage of strange images, doctors and nurses repeatedly asking the patient to say simple things and our heroine's fractured delivery of her mind's confused impressions.

it settles down during the group sessions, led by Amy (January LaVoy) who is so patient and understanding it's quietly maddening. (One of the show's surprises -- to me -- was that our hero Emily didn't snap at Amy.) When Emily discovers that actually touching things (like snow) helps her to verbalize what she is seeing, I think for a moment we're going to explore this and gain a powerful metaphor for handling words and physically grasping the world around us. But this insight leads nowhere and we revert to more discontinuous verbalizing, with Emily slowly circling around the accident that led her to this place.

The show is only about 66 minutes long and throughout we've understood that she is a stunt woman of sorts, a wing walker who literally went out onto the wings of planes (the show is set many years ago, I assume). When she finally describes in somewhat more detail the accident itself and her feeling of release when flying, the climax doesn't pierce the way it should.

I'm not sure whether to fault the play, actress Maxwell (nominated for two Tonys this year) or the production. But I doubt it's director John Doyle and his technical team, who create a beautifully fluid world combining impressive visuals that never oversell the flying metaphor and an intricate sound design that holds your attention when the story becomes too repetitive and nonspecific. Fails to take flight? Sure. But mostly I'm left with the impression of talented people working together to tackle a tricky little piece that can falter at the slightest lapse.

What others said:

Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* said, "An elegant but uninvolved production."

Joe Dziemianowicz of the *New York Daily News* said, "In the end, "Wings" is a play that's easier to admire than to enjoy and more than a little unsettling."



Kourtney K.'s Stunning Bikini Bod



Jane Krakowski Reveals Baby Bump

MOST DISCUSSED RIGHT NOW



One And Done: 'Sarah Palin's Alaska' NOT Renewed: Report

1,228 Comments



Camille Grammer's Porn Past Comes Back To Haunt Her

1,031 Comments

HOT ON FACEBOOK



PHOTOS: Olivia Wilde Dons See-Through Bikini

106 Comments



PHOTOS: Raven-Symone's Dramatic Weight Loss

532 Comments

HOT ON TWITTER



Ashton Kutcher: Training, Paranoid About Real Life 'End Of Days'

904 Comments



Bill Murray Crashes Stranger's Karaoke Party

66 Comments

HUFFPOST'S BIG NEWS PAGES



House Of Representatives



Facebook



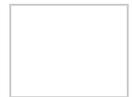
Video



NFL



Gun Control



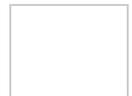
iPad



Haiti Earthquake



Atheism



Sarah Palin

MORE BIG NEWS PAGES »

Frank Scheck of the *New York Post* said, "The star is the ever-versatile Jan Maxwell, delivering a standout performance. John Doyle, who directed the no-frills revivals of "Sweeney Todd" and "Company," goes in the other direction here. He uses every technical trick in the book -- video projections, surround-sound effects, endless swirling movement of performers and props -- to viscerally convey the mental confusion suffered by the lead character."

John Simon of *Bloomberg News* points out that the role was originally intended to be a woman in her 70s and said, "If age does not so much matter here, Doyle's casting and staging unfortunately do. Maxwell is a wonderful actress, but vulnerability, essential to Kopit's portrait, is not her strong suit. In the end, neither cast nor production erased my fond memory of the original."

Andy Propst of *Theatermania* said, "A bravura performance from Jan Maxwell and a top-notch production by director John Doyle combine to make Arthur Kopit's 1978 play *Wings*, currently being revived at Second Stage Theatre, one of the first "must-see" productions of the fall."

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of *Showbiz Sandbox*, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's [available free on iTunes](#). Visit [Michael Giltz at his website](#) and [his daily blog](#). Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called *Popsurfing* and also available for free on iTunes. Link to him on [Netflix](#) and gain access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

Follow Michael Giltz on Twitter: www.twitter.com/michaelgiltz

[More in Entertainment...](#)

Kardashians SUED For \$75 Million Over Debit...

Director: 'Ghostbusters 3' Script Is Ready

Gwyneth Paltrow To Return To 'Glee' As...

Zac Efron And Vanessa Hudgens Back Together?...

Comments

2

Pending Comments

0

[View FAQ](#)

Comments are closed for this entry

[View All](#)

▼ Recency | Popularity

Rozanna 11:27 AM on 10/28/2010

160 Fans

How lucky some New Yorkers are to be able to see two great actors in any play, even this one.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 02:14 PM on 10/28/2010

59 Fans



Oh absolutely. It's why I live here.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

FOLLOW HUFFINGTON POST



SEARCH

FRONT PAGE	POLITICS	BUSINESS	MEDIA	ENTERTAINMENT	COMEDY	SPORTS	STYLE	WORLD	GREEN	FOOD	TRAVEL	TECH	
LIVING	HEALTH	DIVORCE	ARTS	BOOKS	RELIGION	IMPACT	EDUCATION	COLLEGE	NY	LA	CHICAGO	DENVER	BLOGS

[Advertise](#) | [Log In](#) | [Make HuffPost your Home Page](#) | [RSS](#) | [Careers](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Contact Us](#)

[User Agreement](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Comment Policy](#) | [About Us](#) | [Powered by Movable Type](#)

Copyright © 2011 TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc. | "The Huffington Post" is a registered trademark of TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc. All rights reserved.