

Nimble cast makes 'GINT' a homecoming success

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Good theater need not be about spectacle. Better still is a performance based on the more powerful resource of the audience's imagination. That point is made by a financially struggling, but talent-rich New York company called Wreckio Ensemble Theater Company, which opened a three-day run at West Palm Beach's Dreyfoos School of the Arts Friday evening with Romulus Linney's *GINT*.

The production was something of a homecoming, for the nucleus of the movement-rooted troupe is Dreyfoos graduates, plus several alumni of Miami's New World School. There were plenty of life lessons imparted, but the vibrancy of

the company was the main message at Friday's opening. As cleverly as Linney transposed Henrik Ibsen's 19th century Norwegian fable to 20th century Appalachia, the script is skeletal until fleshed out by a nimble ensemble.

The play charts the lifelong journey of Pete Gint, an ambitious Everyman, eager to experience the world and discover himself, but easily led astray until he comes full circle to reunite with his true love. Linney sees links between rustic Norway and Appalachia, with only a few tongue-in-cheek name changes needed. Originally called Solveig, Gint's sweetheart is now Sally Vicks.

More interesting are his alterations in updating the essentially timeless story.

Linney starts at World War I, taking us through the turmoil of Vietnam to the end of the millennium.

Benjamin Spradley, Dreyfoos Class of '96, anchors the production as Gint, projecting a roguish likability and a dancer's agility.

There is a touching sweetness to Traci Hovel's Sally, which makes it all the more disappointing that she's on the sidelines for most of the latter half. The third main character is Gint's Oldie Mamma, played by Dechelle Damien with a puffed out chin, stooped-shouldered gait and affecting sincerity. Her death scene in Spradley's arms is surely the single most moving sequence.

Director Stuart Meltzer knits the rest of the cast into a

versatile backup chorus, variously becoming wedding guests, a horde of hogs, an equally piggish pack of billionaires and a forest of talking trees.

Linney specifies a simple staging that apparently meshes well with Wreckio's esthetics and its resources. The players are all dressed in black t-shirts and baggy slacks, lighting cues are minimal and the most prominent props are a couple of wooden crates. But if you are willing, Wreckio will transport you to Appalachia, to California and within the human heart.

GINT's final performance is at 2 p.m. today in the school's Brandt Black Box Theatre.

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