

NORTH STAR
By Gloria Bond Clunie
Generic Theater
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Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large. In bygone days, when dozens of plays were produced on Broadway each season, it was not unusual for shows to begin rehearsal with only the first act completed by the author. Coming to a meaningful conclusion in the second or third acts has defeated many a would be playwright. Gloria Bond Clunie's NORTH STAR, at times a powerful and absorbing drama, unfortunately suffers from Act Two ailments. But, let's talk about its good points before looking at its problems.

Clunie has created very believable characters to tell her story about a young girl, Aurelia, growing up with her best buddy Willie, in the early days of the civil rights struggle in North Carolina. If you're old enough you'll remember the heroic action of four African American college students at a Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro. As Aurelia matures, she realizes the moral importance of what is going on around her and she and Willie feel they must join the cause. Her parents, Kate and Manson, are in conflict over her becoming involved with the ugly realities of racial injustice. Natalie W. Baker is a vibrant and amusing Kate with a sensitive, serious side to her as well and George T Davis is a strong presence as Manson. Playwright Clunie's first act comes to life with a keen sense of community and a fair amount of humor, thanks to very good performances by Pedro Abad as Hawkins, Diane Faison as Grandma and Michael Singleton as Rev. Blake among others. Erika Grandison is an attractive adult Aurelia.

Director Sharon Cook sees to it that her actors work with simplicity and honesty. Her staging is neat and to the point. Clunie complicates the piece by having the adult Aurelia narrating the story and appearing simultaneously with herself as a child. This device does not work dramatically and tends to get in the way of the action. Even so, the play holds our interest in the first part as it carries the story to the electrifying and frightening beginnings of the civil rights movement.

Then, we get to the second act which devotes most of the focus to the young Aurelia and her adult counterpart. The work loses tension and starts to fall apart. Scenes seem out of place or irrelevant and very repetitious. One hopes the playwright is still working on this project. There is definitely a strong play trying to come to life in a format that right now lacks theatrical compression and dramatic form. With intermission, NORTH STAR ran two hours and thirty plus minutes by my watch. Too long. Judicious cutting and structural revision are needed to cure this rather acute case of Act Two Syndrome.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening..