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Tuesdays With Morrie

Playhouse on Park

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Playhouse on Park is currently presenting a beautiful production of Mitch Albom and Jeffrey Hatcher's moving play, *Tuesdays With Morrie*. The play is based on Albom's popular book by the same name, but I was largely unfamiliar with the piece before entering the theatre. With the superb acting of Gannon McHale and Chris Richards and sensitive direction by Sasha Bratt, I was immediately won over. *Tuesdays With Morrie* manages to be a real tearjerker of a play without ever seeming maudlin or overly sentimental. Indeed, this show truly earns its audience's tears. On a tantalizing set, designed by Christopher Hoyt, this one-act, two-character play genuinely adds up to more than the sum of its parts. It is highly recommended that you head to Playhouse on Park to see *Tuesdays With Morrie*, and don't forget to bring tissues with you.



Gannon McHale and Chris Richards

The show begins with the character of Mitch (played by the excellent Chris Richards) describing how he came to meet and grow attached to college sociology professor Morrie Schwartz (the sublime Gannon McHale). The early scenes delineate their relationship as teacher and student, with Chris Richards acting as both the character of Mitch and as the play's narrator. There is something bittersweet about these opening scenes, as Mitch promises Morrie that he will keep in touch after graduating from college, and then life gets in the way. It is actually sixteen years later that Mitch comes back into Morrie's life and only because he sees Morrie on the news being interviewed about having developed ALS, or Lou Gehrig's Disease.

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I hesitate to give any more of the show's plot away, other than to say that the two men form a bond and, despite Mitch's career demands as a sportswriter, he makes a promise to always visit Morrie on Tuesdays. One of the wonders of this production is that the two actors really seem to have had a deep and long lasting relationship. There is much humor in the show, along with the tears.

As Mitch, Chris Richards is simply wonderful, really evolving as a character throughout the show, from a carefree college student to a more pensive and thoughtful man. Gannon McHale is equally good, perhaps even stronger, in the showier role of Morrie. This is a difficult part physically, in that he has to show a slow deterioration health, but every moment of his performance rings true. It is his spryness and sense of humor as Morrie that endears him to the audience, even during the saddest and most heartrending of scenes. Indeed, *Tuesdays With Morrie* actually manages the neat trick of make us laugh and cry at the same time.

Tuesdays With Morrie is a deeply felt and also deeply rewarding play. Gannon McHale and Chris Richards, are wonderful at playing opposite each other, convincing us that there is a history between them, that they are actually teacher and student. Director Sasha Bratt keeps the show from ever feeling manipulative or false and brings out the beauty and pathos in Mitch Albom and Jerry Hatcher's playwriting. Playhouse on Park's *Tuesdays With Morrie* is a real winner, by turns funny and sorrowful, with a pair of superlative actors transforming a rather small scale show into a very full and richly satisfying evening of theatre.

Tuesdays With Morrie continues performances at Playhouse on Park in West Hartford CT through October 18, 2015. For tickets, please visit www.playhouseonpark.org or call the box office at (860) 523-5900.

Photo: Meredith Atkinson

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