

Top-notch acting in 'Daisy'

NEW YORK (CNS) — An exquisite wisp of a movie, "Driving Miss Daisy" (Warner Bros.) should come as a breath of fresh air to anyone who's sweated through recent celluloid junk.

Adapted by Alfred Uhry from his Pulitzer Prize-winning play, the film brings to life three unforgettable characters who can actually be mistaken for real people. This beguiling trio are played by actors who are sure to be top contenders at Oscar time.

When the film opens in 1948, fiercely independent widow Daisy Werthan (Jessica Tandy) is 72 and no one's fool. A wealthy Atlanta Jew, she is used to minding her own business and doing for herself with some help from her crankier housekeeper, Idella (Esther Rolle), and her congenial married son, Boolie (Dan Aykroyd). Daisy takes pride in her poor roots and exasperates Boolie with her stubborn insistence on driving herself around town with no concern for her decreasing eyesight and increasing accident record.

When she backs her shiny new Packard smack dab into a neighbor's garden, Boolie hires black driver Hoke Colburn (Morgan Freeman) to solve Daisy's transportation problems. Thankfully, the 62-year-old widower has more than enough patience and common sense to stand firm in the center of Miss Daisy's stormy refusal to take him seriously. What begins as a contest of wills gradually develops into a friendship that spans 25 years and an era of turbulent change for Southern minorities.

Director Bruce Beresford may have been born and bred in Australia, but he's developed quite a feel for the American South, as witnessed in this film as well as in "Tender Mercies" and his more recent "Crimes of the Heart."

Beresford covers most of this film in a beautiful golden patina that perfectly captures the final, transitional decades in the lives of both Daisy and the Old South. In contrast, as Boolie rises in reputation as a

community scion at the helm of the Werthan family cotton mill, he and his riotous social-climbing wife Florine (Patti Lupone) are enveloped in bright, vibrant colors.

Beresford and writer Uhry also manage to make a film about two minorities without stooping to caricatures or ethnic or racial stereotypes. Daisy, Hoke and Boolie may face their share of prejudice, but none handles it predictably. She denies being a racial bigot and risks community censure by taking a front-row seat at a 1965 Martin Luther King banquet, but she's not above denying Hoke a rest stop on a long journey to Mobile, Ala., and feels blacks will steal what they want when they want it.

Hoke, on the other hand, is not blinded to his minority status. Unlike Daisy, he faces prejudice on a daily basis and takes his battles one at a time. He's always one step ahead of Daisy's carefully couched bigotry.

The performances are top-notch, the best of this or any other season. There's Rolle as Daisy's long-suffering, snippy housekeeper and Lupone as Daisy's spunky, nouveau riche daughter-in-law. Aykroyd proves once again that he's a serious actor of unlimited potential as Daisy's frustrated but adoring son.

Freeman, who earlier this year gave a strong showing as Joe Clark in the disappointing "Lean on Me," gives the performance of his career as Hoke, a role that he originated on stage. He and the luminous Tandy (the one to beat in this year's Best Actress contentions) are the stuff that legends are made of.

Due to the racial and religious prejudice suggested as symptomatic of the film's time and place, younger children may misunderstand its point of view. As a result, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.



Catholic News Service

REST STOP — Pausing on the road to Mobile, Ala., are Southern matron Daisy Werthan, played by Jessica Tandy, and her chauffeur Hoke Colburn, played by actor Morgan Freeman, in "Driving Miss Daisy." The U.S. Catholic Conference calls the film "a breath of fresh air" with "unforgettable characters" and classifies it A-II — adults and adolescents.

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