

RECENTLY

Other editions: [Mobile](#) | [News Feeds](#) | [E-Newsletters](#) | [Subscribe to the Free Press](#)

Find it: [Jobs](#) | [Cars](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Apartments](#) | [Shopping](#) | [Classifieds](#)



SEARCH ALL



[HOME](#) [LOCAL](#) [NATION/WORLD](#) [SPORTS](#) [ENTERTAINMENT](#) [AUTOS/BUSINESS](#) [LIFE](#) [TRAVEL](#) [OPINION](#) [OBITUARIES](#) [EXTRAS](#)

[Site Index](#) [Photos](#) [Videos](#) [Add your photos](#) [Lottery](#) [Past headlines](#) [Weather](#) [Subscribe to the Free Press](#) [Site Services](#) [Contests](#)

[Comment, blog & share photos](#)
Log in | [Become a member](#)

POWERED BY YOU AND THE **Detroit Free Press**
ON GUARD FOR 177 YEARS

A cloud floats by 'The Sunshine Boys'

UDM production is decidedly downbeat

BY JOHN MONAGHAN • FREE PRESS SPECIAL WRITER • OCTOBER 2, 2008

Post a Comment Recommend Print this page E-mail this article Share this article: [?](#)

I found little joy in the prospect of revisiting "The Sunshine Boys," Neil Simon's tale of aged vaudevillians reunited for a TV special in 1972. What intrigued me was the chance to see Detroit theater vets Arthur J. Beer and David Regal make these roles their own.

ADVERTISEMENT

On that front, the new production by the University of Detroit Mercy Theatre Company doesn't disappoint. Beer delivers Simon's requisite one-liners just fine, but he's best at creating a poignant portrait of old age. He fearlessly employs his considerable girth to depict Willy Clark, a grumpy old man who forgets little things like the last time he left his room in a shabby New York hotel.

What he does remember is the grand old days of vaudeville, when he and former partner Al Lewis (Regal) were headliners as comedy duo Lewis and Clark. Willy's nephew Ben (Joel Frazee), a theatrical agent, has been trying to secure the old man work in commercials, but Willy keeps muffing his lines and forgetting the product he's supposed to push.

Things look up when NBC invites Lewis and Clark to appear on a special about the history of comedy. All they have to do is re-create one of their classic bits -- a bawdy doctor's office sketch -- and they will walk away with \$10,000 to share.

Sure, they know the routine by heart. They did it the same way for 43 years.



UDM Theatre Company

David Regal, left, and Arthur Beer play a couple of aged and estranged vaudevillians in "The Sunshine Boys."

'THE SUNSHINE BOYS'
**

out of four stars

8 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun. Through Oct. 12.

University of Detroit Mercy Theatre Company

Marygrove College

8425 W. McNichols, Detroit

\$15; \$12 students, seniors

313-993-3270 or www.theatre.udmercy.edu

RELATED NEWS FROM THE WEB

- Theater
- Comedy Movies
- Arts
- University of Detroit Mercy
- The Sunshine Boys
- Powered by Topix.net

More Entertainment headlines

Kid Rock debuts 'Roll On' video shot in Detroit

(5)

The problem is they haven't spoken to each other in the last dozen. And although Al is willing to bury the hatchet, Willy still can't forgive him for retiring from the act.

The show is full of Simon-style one-liners, especially when Willy rants about how the only words that are truly funny include a "c" or a "k."

The show took a little while to hit its stride during Sunday's matinee. This was caused first by erratic lighting cues and then by awkward pauses in the dialogue. The play was never meant to be a laugh-a-second comedy, but director Andrew Huff keeps this "Sunshine Boys" decidedly downbeat and understated -- something you don't usually associate with Simon's plays.

I had forgotten how much the play actually revolves around Willy. (Maybe that's because of the dynamic presence of Oscar winner George Burns as Al in the 1975 movie version.) Willy is seen mostly in a hotel room decorated with framed photographs, a ragged vinyl recliner and a TV set that doesn't work. Give credit to the set designers for evoking the appropriately unglamorous retro décor.

The production is a homecoming of sorts for Regal, who helped launch UDM Theatre Company and has returned after an ill-fated stint as artistic director at Meadow Brook. Beer has spent more than 30 years in the UDM program (along with work on other local stages) and currently leads the school's performing arts department.

Although you can see the lunatic sparks sometimes fly between Lewis and Clark during the eventual delivery of their doctor skit, Regal plays Al on downers. He says he's happy, but there's also a lot of desperation that comes from living in a single room in your daughter's New Jersey home. You can sense Regal's mind at work here as his performance recalls the countless comics whose private lives were full of sadness.

That melancholy tone defines this production of "The Sunshine Boys." I admired it often as I watched, but didn't have a whole lot of fun.





Contact freelance writer **JOHN MONAGHAN** at madjohn@earthlink.net.

In your voice

READ REACTIONS TO THIS STORY

POWERED BY 

You must be logged in to leave a comment. [Login](#) | [Register](#)

- Inventor's quest leads to long years of frustration 
- Young love blossoms on wild odyssey 
- Tabloid journalism mockery is too soft 
- Everything's solid about 'Appaloosa' 

MOST POPULAR

MOST E-MAILED

1. Biden, Palin hold their own in VP debate
2. Lions staff can't afford to give up on present by playing Stanton, dealing Williams
3. Read VP debate blog, final grades
4. Our scorecard of the VP debate
5. Palin impressive in manner but not answers
6. Pistons hoping ex-No. 1 pick Kwame Brown finds reduced role is his recipe for success
7. WWJ reporter fired for wearing Obama T-shirt
8. Aussie boy goes on animal killing spree at zoo
9. Palin exceeds expectations, but still fails
10. McCain camp leaves Michigan

ADS BY PULSE 360

[Get Listed Here](#)

"Your Credit Score Stinks!"

A good credit score is 700+. View yours online instantly now, FREE.
www.CreditReportAmerica.com

2008 Diet of the Year

How I lost 44 lbs in 30 Days without a Diet. As seen on CNN, Fox & MSN
www.OneWomensBlog.com

AARP & The Hartford Auto Insurance

Save \$363 On AARP Auto Insurance If You're Over 49. Free Quotes Now!
AARP.TheHartford.com

1000 characters left

Submit

INSIDE FREEP.COM



PHOTO GALLERY

The Millen era comes to an end

Take a trip through these photos from Matt Millen's tumultuous tenure as the Lions President and CEO.



MIKE THOMPSON ANIMATION

Kilpatrick sings his farewell

Free Press cartoonist Mike Thompson offers his musical take on former Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick's good-bye.



PHOTO GALLERY

See inside the Manoogian

Ever been curious what's inside? Check out our archival photos taken inside the Manoogian Mansion.



COLLEGE FOOTBALL

See U-M, MSU video highlights

Watch these video highlights from U-M and MSU football each weekend right here on freep.com.



PHOTO GALLERY

Metro Detroit's best sandwiches

Hungry? You will be after you see a special gallery of the best sandwiches the area has to offer.

SITE INDEX

Home

- Photos
Videos
Add your photos
Lottery
Print edition
Contact us
Frequently Asked
Questions
Help

Local

- Detroit
Wayne
Oakland
Macomb
Metro
Michigan
Election 2008
Driving & traffic
School closings
Columnists

Nation/World

- Top stories
Lotteries
Election 2008
Nation/World
Business

Sports

- Lions
Pistons
Red Wings
Tigers
U-M Wolverines
MSU Spartans
High School Sports
Scores
Columnists
Shock
Outdoors
Olympics sports
Golf
Auto racing
Detroit Marathon

Entertainment

- Search for events
Things to do
Celebrities
Movies
Music
TV/Radio
Casinos
Theater/Arts
Dining
Video games
Metromix.com
Photos

Autos/Business

- Auto news
Business news
Markets
Auto reviews
Technology
Detroit Auto Show

Life

- Travel
USA Today Travel
Shopping
Relationships
Food
Pets
Health
Columnists
Technology
Twist

Opinion

- Editorials
Blogs
Cartoons
Letters to the Editor
Columnists
Forums

Obituaries

- Death notices

Extras

- Photos
Videos
Databases
Digital Free Press
Forums
Lottery
Comics
Scores
Contests

ADVERTISEMENT



Partners: Jobs: CareerBuilder.com Cars: Cars.com Apartments: Apartments.com Shopping: ShopLocal.com

Home | Local | Nation/World | Sports | Entertainment | Autos/Business | Life | Travel | Opinion | Obituaries | Extras | Site Map

Contact Us | Subscribe

Copyright ©2008 ... Use of this site signifies your agreement to the Terms of Service and Privacy Policy , updated March 2007.