

See Rock City

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By Melinda Schupmann



The second part of Arlene Hutton's Nibroc Trilogy is a subtle, humorous continuation of her first offering, *The Last Train to Nibroc*. In *Last Train*, young World War II soldier Raleigh (Gary Clemmer) and schoolteacher May (Staci Michelle Armao) meet on a train and discover they both grew up in Corbin, Ky. That encounter ends with their realization that they belong together. *See Rock City* finds them married and living with May's parents. Raleigh, a writer whose epilepsy has prevented him from staying in the service, is jobless and has to depend on May to support them. The optimism Raleigh had in *Last Train* is waning, and he finds himself at a crossroads.

Hutton creates an engrossing slice of life, as the newlyweds adjust to each other post-honeymoon. May's mother (Linda Kerns) is a warm, supportive woman who tries to help the young people come to terms with their new lives. Raleigh's mother (Bonnie Bailey-Reed) is a pitch-perfect product of rural superstitions and unsophisticated ignorance. Kerns and Bailey-Reed add nuanced substance to the story as their world changes at the conclusion of the war. Armao and Clemmer adeptly capture the youthful optimism or dawning understanding of their new circumstances that carry the story forward. At the end of *Rock City*, the audience is left with unanswered questions and a palpable desire to see the conclusion in the final episode (*Gulf View Drive*, playing in repertory).

Gary Lee Reed's expertly articulated rural home adds an artful touch. Combined with Bill Kickbush's moody lighting and Nick Omana and Seth Hum's musical choices, the atmosphere is well-suited to the unfolding story. Paula Higgins' 1940s costumes are well thought-out. Director Nan McNamara understands the character-driven work well, and her choices make the production feel authentic. Hutton (a pseudonym for director-actor Beth Lincks) creates a story line that takes second place to the evocative emotions it engenders as the characters mature and confront events that alter their dreams. It is high-quality work in the best theatrical sense and will likely be a future standard for theatre companies.

Presented by Actors' Co-op at the Crossley Theatre, 1760 N. Gower St., Hollywood. Repertory schedule. Sep. 9-Nov. 18. (323) 462-8460.