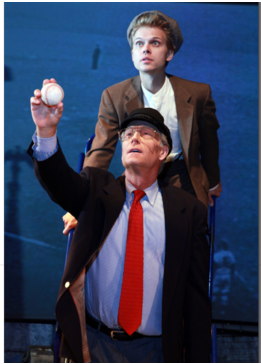


# 'Ernie' a stirring homage to beloved Tiger announcer

KEN GLICKMAN, For the Lansing State Journal 10:08 a.m. EDT August 20, 2015



(Photo: Courtesy photograph)



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"Ernie" opened in the Gem Theater, in the shadow of Comerica Park, in 2011 for what was to be a three-week run. It has become the most popular play in the history of Detroit. The two-person show is now in its fifth year and has been seen by over 80,000 people

It is now on stage at Wharton Center's Pasant Theater through Sunday.

And "Ernie" has strong local roots. It is directed by Williamston Theatre co-founder and artistic director Tony Caselli, and the set is designed by Michigan State University theater professor, Kirk Domer.

You don't have to love baseball and even live in Detroit to enjoy "Ernie." The play is about America, it's about the passage of time, and it's about a man who loved his wife and loved his God. Nostalgia and old time values play a strong part in the Ernie story.

Although "Ernie" is a small show – two actors, 90 minutes – it feels larger. Yes, we get to bask in the great voices and acting skills of Peter Carey as Ernie, and TJ Corbett as the "boy", the play's hi-tech production almost adds another character.

A bank of lights on either side of the stage simulate stadium lights and three large screens project wonderful images (movie and still) of Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb and great shots of Ernie Harwell. And the use of sound is excellent.

To unravel Harwell's story, Albom has again relied on his life and death sensibilities to carry the day. The play takes place backstage at Comerica Park before Ernie is given his final honor in front of the adoring fans. A boy appears; wearing clothes of Ernie's childhood and cajoles the announcer to tell his incredible life story.

Who is this boy – his long ago dead brother? One of his old colleagues? Or is he only an apparition? It's a mystery that keeps the audience guessing – but the theatrical device is pure Albom.

Carey's acting absolutely brings Harwell back to life. His rich baritone voice is warm with that distinctive Southern twang. And his walk is slow and rocking, just like Harwell. The nameless boy (Corbett) is full of energy, spunk and understanding.

The two play off each other with sparkly timing but also with genuine tenderness.

Ernie Harwell called the Tiger games for 40 years. He became a Michigan icon when people loved to listen to baseball on the radio from a real storyteller, someone who made the game come alive using their colorful descriptions and expressive voices only.

"Ernie" is a heartwarming homage to the great master of sports announcing, told by one of America's greatest weavers of stories, Mitch Albom.