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REVIEW: Ernie

City Theatre

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This would be merely two guys talking without the vibrant performances of Peter Carey as Ernie Harwell, and Timothy "TJ" Corbett as the Boy. Carey, in his second year playing the role, sounds almost exactly like Harwell; the timbre is natural, but the phrasing and Georgia accent are also pitch-perfect. His movements, too, have the authenticity of the nonagenarian he's playing ("Ernie" takes place the night of Harwell's farewell appearance at Comerica Park).

Corbett, who has played Boy all five seasons, can still pass for a young teenager. The knee-pants and newsboy cap help sell the image, but somewhere there's a portrait of Corbett aging rapidly. Eager and energetic, almost puppylike, as Boy, Corbett also plays a more sedate smattering of adults, like Ted Williams.

Williams, Harwell himself, old Tiger Stadium and other people, places and things appear in videos and still pictures projected on screens at the back of the stage. Video designer Alison Dobbins is one of the unseen hands contributing substantially to the production.

Top among them would be original and only director, Tony Caselli. "Ernie" moves so fluidly and easily, across and around the City Theatre's wide, shallow stage, and sometimes up (on a staircase on wheels) you'd think it was occurring naturally. You're never aware of the hand at the helm, and that's the sign of a play well directed.

1 hour, 25 minutes.

SHOW DETAILS:

Ernie
City Theatre
Olympia Entertainment, 2211 Woodward Avenue, Detroit
July 8--August 2, 2015
Thursday-Saturday evenings at 8:00 p.m.
Matinees Saturdays at 2:00 p.m. and Sundays at 3:00 p.m.
Special show times July 26 and August 2 at 1:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m.
\$20.00-\$25.00
(800) 745-3000
www.OlympiaEntertainment.com

The importance of being Ernie

by Martin F. Kohn

Article:9950; Posted: July 10, 2015 at 5:30 p.m.

No one ever called him Mr. Harwell—not more than once, anyway. If you met him he'd make you feel like a friend. If you'd never met him, only heard him on the radio...he'd make you feel like a friend. Ernie Harwell was that kind of man.

And "Ernie" is that kind of play—it's a memorable visit with a cherished chum. Back for its fifth season at the City Theatre, Mitch Albom's play about the late baseball broadcaster continues its winning ways, a habit that team performing across Woodward Avenue might hope to emulate.

"Ernie" is a very good play about a very good man.

What makes it a winner? For starters (and no, there won't be any jokes about relievers), there's Harwell himself, voice of the Tigers for four decades and, before that, for other teams. He started young and ended old. In his 92 years, he knew everyone from Ty Cobb to Brad Ausmus and had a wealth of stories to tell.

Some of his best stories were about himself, not that the kindly, self-effacing Harwell was all that eager to tell them. That's where playwright Albom's considerable skills come into play. He invents a character, the somewhat mysterious Boy, who stands in for the rest of us, asking reluctant Ernie questions that prompt reminiscences. Thus, we learn how Harwell came to "identify" fans in the stands who caught home runs and foul balls (and a lady from Livonia goes home with a souvenir), and how in his early days of baseball broadcasting, he would re-create play-by-play accounts of away games with telegraphed bare-bones information and a few sound effects.

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