

Sacramento Theatre Company

Study Guide



Driving Miss Daisy

by Alfred Uhry

Study Guide Prepared: December 12, 2015 by William Myers



SACRAMENTO THEATRE COMPANY

1419 H Street * Sacramento, California 95814 * 916-446-7501

Sacramento Theatre Company

Mission Statement

The Sacramento Theatre Company (STC) strives to be the leader in integrating professional theatre with theatre arts education. STC produces engaging professional theatre, provides exceptional theatre training, and uses theatre as a tool for educational engagement.

Our History

The theatre was originally formed as the Sacramento Civic Repertory Theatre in 1942, an ad hoc troupe formed to entertain locally-stationed troops during World War II. On October 18, 1949, the Sacramento Civic Repertory Theatre acquired a space of its own with the opening of the Eaglet Theatre, named in honor of the Eagle, a Gold Rush-era theatre built largely of canvas that had stood on the city's riverfront in the 1850s. The Eaglet Theatre eventually became the Main Stage of the not-for-profit Sacramento Theatre Company, which evolved from a community theatre to professional theatre company in the 1980s. Now producing shows in three performance spaces, it is the oldest theatre company in Sacramento.

After five decades of use, the Main Stage was renovated as part of the H Street Theatre Complex Project. Features now include an expanded and modernized lobby and a Cabaret Stage for special performances. The facility also added expanded dressing rooms, laundry capabilities, and other equipment allowing the transformation of these performance spaces, used nine months of the year by STC, into backstage and administration places for three months each summer to be used by California Musical Theatre for Music Circus.

Sacramento Theatre Company can accommodate 292 patrons in the proscenium-style auditorium of its Main Stage, while the Pollock Stage offers a more intimate experience with only 87 seats in a black box-style theatre. Both provide good acoustics and sight-lines. This professional, Equity theatre presents seven professional productions per season with a reputation for excellent stage adaptations of classic literature. Three annual productions in the Cabaret Stage, which seats 100, round out the experience with high-quality Broadway musical revues.

The Young Professionals Conservatory, a training program for young theatre artists, was founded in 2003. The program, as well as the entire STC School of the Arts, is directed by Michele Hillen-Noufer.

For further information about the Sacramento Theatre Company please visit us online:

<http://www.sactheatre.org>



SACRAMENTO THEATRE COMPANY

1419 H Street * Sacramento, California 95814 * 916-446-7501

Contents

Summary	4
Production History	4
Playwright	5
Characters	6
Civil Rights Movement	7
Social Etiquette	10
Technical Elements	11
Theatre Etiquette	12
Learning More (Sources/further research)	13



Summary

Daisy Werthan, an elderly southern Jewish woman living in Atlanta, has recently totaled her new automobile. Between the influence of the insurance companies and his own concerns; Daisy's son Boolie has arranged for a chauffeur to drive her around as necessary. Starting at \$20 per week, that driver is Hoke Colburn, a sixty year old African American man.

A retired teacher, Daisy was raised and experienced many of the hardships of being impoverished and living in a poor neighborhood. She is also resistant to any changes in her lifestyle, so she has a difficult time giving in and using the driver. She wishes the freedom to go about on her own and doesn't want to be seen putting on airs.

Given time, Daisy grows used to relying on Hoke; but the two continue to struggle with the balance between the employer and the employee relationship, religion, race, and friendship throughout their history together (from 1948 to 1973). Their personal challenges reflect a complex micro-cosm of the Civil Rights Movement.

Production History

Driving Miss Daisy is the first play in Alfred Uhry's Atlanta Trilogy, focused on the circumstances of southern Jews in the early twentieth century. It was staged at Playwrights Horizons in 1987 before being transferred to the John Houseman Theatre where it would run for three years. In 1988, it opened in London's West End and received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

The play was adapted for film in 1989 and become an even greater success, going on to win four Academy Awards. It starred Jessica Tandy as Miss Daisy and Morgan Freeman in the role of Hoke.

Despite the play and film's early success, it didn't reach Broadway itself until it received a revival in October, 2010. This production, using the original stage version of the script, starred Vanessa Redgrave and James Earl Jones as Miss Daisy and Hoke and included Boyd Gains as Boolie. It ran until April, 2011 at the John Golden Theatre.



The Playwright

Alfred Uhry was born on December 3, 1936 in Atlanta. His family was of German decent and was Jewish, somewhat prosperous in a time when many were just recovering from the Depression. He attended Brown University, obtaining a degree in English and Drama in 1958. Uhry then relocated to teach English at the Calhoun School in New York City.

Many of Uhry's first attempts at writing plays and musicals were considered failures. His first collaboration with Robert Waldman resulted in the 1968 play, *Here's Where I Belong*, which closed after one performance. The pair had better luck with the play, *The Robber Bridegroom*, which was on Broadway in both 1975 and 1976, and had a year-long national tour, earning Uhry his first Tony nomination.

After the success of *Driving Miss Daisy*, Uhry wrote *The Last Night in Ballyhoo* (1996). Set in 1939 during the premiere of the film *Gone with the Wind*, it was the second of his Atlanta Trilogy. He was awarded a Tony for Best Play for its Broadway run.

The third piece in the Atlanta trilogy was the 1998 musical *Parade* about the 1913 trial of Leo Frank, a Jewish factory manager. The music was created by Jason Robert Brown and Uhry's libretto earned him another Tony (for Best Book of a Musical).

Uhry is married and has four daughters.



Alfred Uhry (2013)



The Characters

Daisy Werthan - a Jewish widow, native to Atlanta, Georgia. She is 72 years old in 1948 at the beginning of the play, and 97 years old in 1973 at the end of the play. Born 11 years after the end of Civil War, she witnessed some of the most significant social changes in American history. She was in Atlanta when Leo Frank was lynched in 1913 – one of the most horrific displays of anti-Semitism in Atlanta’s history. She lived through the woman suffrage movement and the passage of the 19th Amendment (which guaranteed women’s right to vote), World Wars I and II, the Temple bombing of 1958, Martin Luther King Jr.’s ascension to fame and the Civil Rights Movement, the Cold War and the beginning of the Watergate Scandal. Her father-in-law was a self-made man who founded his own business, and she and her husband enjoyed financial success. Yet through it all, she remains fiercely rooted in her frugal upbringing, her early career as a teacher, her Southern propriety and her Judaism.

Boolie Werthan - Daisy’s son, also born and raised in Atlanta. He is 40 years old in the first scene of the play in 1948, and 65 years old at the show’s end in 1973. He grew up through World War I, and was a young man during the Great Depression. He observed his parents’ dedication to their work and took over the family business, increasing its success. He is dutiful to his mother, despite her prickly personality. Though he clearly cares for Daisy, it’s not in the way that she would find most fitting. When visiting her husband’s grave, Daisy notes that Boolie would prefer that she let the cemetery handle the care of his gravesite. “Perpetual care they call it,” notes Daisy. “Boolie will have me in perpetual care before I’m cold.” Indeed, Daisy is right; in the last scene of the play, Boolie is making arrangements to sell her house before going to visit her at her retirement home on Thanksgiving. He never has any children of his own.

Hoke Colburn - an African-American man, native to Georgia. He is 60 years old in 1948 at the beginning of the play, and 85 years old in 1973 at the end. Before meeting Daisy, he had neither traveled nor learned to read. He has a daughter and granddaughter. Although he is 12 years younger than Daisy, he has also witnessed the same pivotal events in American history. He was a young man in 1913 when Leo Frank was lynched, but as a child he had already witnessed the lynching of his friend’s father (which was a common occurrence in the state of Georgia in the late 1800s). He grew up in the thick of the Jim Crow era, and for most of his life experienced segregation, discrimination, injustice and racism.

Unseen/Unheard

Idella - The African-American housekeeper Daisy hired on when Boolie was in the 8th grade (which would have been around 1920).

Florine - Boolie’s wife and Daisy’s daughter-in-law. Daisy doesn’t care for her, and doesn’t keep that opinion to herself very well.

Miss McClatchey - Boolie’s secretary, who remains in his employment through the 25-year span of the play, and likely through her entire career.



Civil Rights Movement

Although Americans celebrated the 50th anniversary of the 1954 success of the Civil Rights movement in having the Supreme Court strike down the "separate but equal" clause (Brown vs Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas - 1954) in 2014; events of 2015 in Ferguson and Baltimore (among many others) show that our country is far from finished in our efforts to understand the nature of discrimination and ensure basic human liberties to all citizens.

A Timeline

1600s: The trans-Atlantic slave trade begins.

1837: Engineers working for the Western and Atlantic Railroad stake out a point as the southern end of their intended rail line. At first named Terminus, this point was the beginning of the city of Atlanta, Georgia.

November 6, 1860: Abraham Lincoln is elected President of the United States.

December 20, 1860 - February 1, 1861: South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas secede from the Union.

January 31, 1865: Congress passes the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, abolishing legal slavery throughout the United States.

April 14, 1865: Deeply disappointed by the Union victory in the Civil War, actor and Confederate sympathizer John Wilkes Booth assassinates President Lincoln at Ford's Theatre.

1865-1877: During the Reconstruction period following the Civil War, the U.S. enacts policies including military occupation in the South, in an attempt to fully reunite former Confederate states with the Union states. Many Southerners see this time as continuing acts of Northern aggression.

March 30, 1870: The 15th Amendment to the Constitution is ratified, giving African-American men the right to vote.

February 23, 1875: First "Jim Crow" laws are enacted in Tennessee, slowly imposing racial segregation across the country. The city of Atlanta will become deeply segregated, with separate rail cars, public parks, churches and schools for white and black populations.

1909: The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is formed in New York City with the mission of ensuring the political, educational, social and economic equality of the rights of all persons.



1915: A group of men calling themselves “The Knights of Mary Phagan” gather in Stone Mountain, Georgia, to revive the Ku Klux Klan. They vow to protect the Southern way of life against the threat of Jews, African Americans, Catholics, immigrants and other outsiders.

1919: The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution gives American women the right to vote.

May 30, 1922: President Warren G. Harding dedicates the Lincoln Memorial. The ceremonies are racially segregated.

1948: President Harry S Truman issues an executive order desegregating the U.S. Armed Forces.

1954: In *Brown v. The Board of Education*, the Supreme Court rules that “separate is inherently unequal,” leading the way to the legal desegregation of American schools.

1955: Rosa Parks is arrested, beginning the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the first high-profile, non-violent action of the African-American Civil Rights Movement.

1957: Arkansas Governor Orval Rubus uses National Guard to block nine African American students from attending Little Rock High School; following a court order, President Eisenhower sends in federal troops to ensure compliance. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Leads the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott.

1958: The Hebrew Benevolent Congregation’s temple in Atlanta, Georgia, is bombed. Rabbi Jacob Rothschild was a vocal opponent of segregation. Five arrests were made; though no one was ever convicted, the man who called the bomb into the press claimed to be working on behalf of “The Confederate Underground.”

1960: Four African American college students begin sit-ins at a lunch counter of a Greensboro, North Carolina restaurant where patrons are not served.

1961: Freedom Rides begin from Washington DC into Southern states.

1962: President Kennedy sends federal troops to the University of Mississippi to quell riots so James Meredith, the school's first African American student, can attend. Supreme Court rules that segregation is unconstitutional in all transportation facilities. The Dept. of Defense orders full integration of military reserve units, National Guard excluded.



1963: Protests against segregation in Birmingham, Alabama meet with severe police retaliation led by Sheriff "Bull" Connors. A church bombing in Birmingham leaves four African American girls dead. Race riots prompt modified martial law in Cambridge, Maryland. A Civil Rights leader (Medgar Evers) is killed by a sniper. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivers his "I Have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

1964: U.S. Congress passes the Civil Rights Act of 1964, forbidding racial discrimination in all public accommodations and employment, resulting in the end of Jim Crow laws. To achieve this, they spend 75 DAYS in filibuster. Three civil rights workers disappear in Mississippi after being stopped for speeding; the bodies are found buried six weeks later.

1965: After two civil rights workers are killed in Selma, Alabama; a march from Selma to Montgomery is held to demand protection for voting rights. Malcolm X is assassinated. Riots in Watts, Los Angeles leaves 34 dead. Congress passes the Voting Right Act.

1968: Dr. Martin Luther King is assassinated in Memphis, sparking riots throughout the country.

1972: Congress passes the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, opening the door to affirmative action.

At this point, any real effort to maintain a time line breaks down because protests, riots, organizations and groups form and try to take the movement in a variety (some radical, some more conservative) of directions. There are riots almost constantly in one place or another for the latter half of the 60's and into the 70's.



Personal Interactions and Manners

For those who were raised in the early twentieth century, manners and one's interactions with friends, associates, and complete strangers on the street or in society were dictated by very clear rules. These rules of social etiquette ranged from how to greet someone and enter into conversation with them on the street to offering hospitality to guests; they also provided the basis for what we might casually, today, call 'class': diction and poise, refinement and delicacy.

How did one know what was done and what was scandalous? To some extent this was a part of the traditional education parents provided their children, but it was not uncommon for communities to have specific individuals who provided 'finishing' for the young, teaching them the current standards of refinement, especially among the well to-do. A finishing school was almost a must for a family who only recently improved their financial standing (and thus, social potential). For some, the important reference was "the Emily Post." first Emily Post published her book, *Etiquette* in 1922. Her family continues to publish on the subject of manners and polite social interaction to this day.

For Daisy to survive in southern Atlanta as a school teacher, she would have been judged severely for any impropriety or violations of the social contract. Her ability to act with poise and refinement would have been an even more important part of supporting her husband as his business grew and the family moved upward through several financial circles.

It's important to note that while Miss Daisy has had a maid who comes in and takes care of things three days a week for years (even at the beginning of the play) and now retains a chauffeur, she still isn't wealthy to the degree that we might expect of someone who has their own driver or a maid service. Such things were available to most reasonably affluent citizens, in the middle or upper middle classes.

This was because many individuals were able to survive and even raise families without an income that earned money. All they really needed was a home and sufficient land to produce basic foodstuffs. Things that couldn't be produced were traded for extra crops or were earned through short term labor or temporary jobs such as cleaning a house a few days a week or driving someone around.



The Setting

The play takes place in a number of locations ranging from Daisy's home to the cemetery where her husband is buried. Several scenes take place in the car and others in Boolie's office or home. Because representing all these locations in detail would take either a great deal of stage space or a significant number of large scale scenery changes, the play is produced on a fairly abstract space. Scenic elements are provided, but instead of being realistically presented, the 'impression' of the actual object is shown. This enables the locations to appear to be different from scene to scene without needing to bring an Oldsmobile onstage.

The Costumes

One of the more difficult challenges of the costume design for this production is the need to represent some thirty years of time while quickly jumping through the years. Not only do the clothing styles change significantly over that time frame, but so does the age of the characters. The show takes place in under ninety minutes with no intermission... but Daisy goes from a still active 72 into nearly incapable of moving on her own in her nineties.

Lighting and Sound

The lighting and sound design elements for *Driving Miss Daisy* follow one of the older rules of technical theatre for this production: that if the job is done properly, no one will notice that there was lighting or sound utilized. Clearly, there are style choices that have been made and what was used for each moment was selected to serve a specific purpose. In a show of this nature, the goal is simply to ensure that there is light (of the right color and intensity) where light is needed to see the actor or their actions on stage and that there is sound as needed to inform the audience of an action that is physically taken but requires sound to clarify. The music must be of the right emotional tone to fill the silences between the moments that actors are present on stage.

There is no spectacle: if there are moving lights or scrolling colors, those things move and scroll in the moments of darkness under the sound of strings.



Theatre Etiquette

- Arrive at the theater on time.
- Visit the restroom before the performance begins.
- Turn off your cell phone. Do not speak on the phone or text during the performance.
- Pay attention to announcements that are made prior to the show about the rules of the theater you are attending and the location of the fire exits.
- Please don't speak during the performance unless you are encouraged by the performers to participate. The Overture (introductory music) in musical theater is part of the performance, so please refrain from speaking when it begins.
- Please do not take pictures during the performance. It can be very distracting to the actors and can cause a mishap. It can also be a violation of an actor's contract.
- Remain in your seat for the entire performance. If you must leave, exit during intermission. In an emergency, wait for an appropriate break in the show. It is rude to get up in the middle of a quiet moment.
- Please refrain from eating or drinking in the theater.
- Please do not put your feet up on the seats or balcony and do not kick the seat in front of you. Please don't put or throw anything on the stage.
- Please feel free to laugh when the performance is funny.
- Please feel free to applaud when it is appropriate during the performance.
- Please applaud when the performance is over... this tells the performers and crew that you appreciate their work.
- Do not whistle, stomp your feet, or scream out to the performers



Using What You've Learned to Learn More

Driving Miss Daisy is frequently produced and is a popular production, so will be easy to find out more information about the play via other resources, like the internet. Beyond the play, there is a vast wealth of information available about the Civil Rights Movement and the challenges Daisy and Hoke overcame to become friends. Learning more about the Civil Rights Movement will aid you in becoming more aware and capable of understanding the issues facing America today.

About the Civil Rights Movement - Wikipedia

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American_Civil_Rights_Movement_\(1896-1954\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American_Civil_Rights_Movement_(1896-1954))

As usual, Wikipedia makes for an extremely useful starting point to begin research into a subject. Be sure to investigate the References at the bottom of the wiki page, especially the External links.

NAACP - National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

<http://www.naacp.org>

If there is any one 'organization' that still continues the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement, it is the NAACP. Their site is filled with information on both the history and legal advances over the years since the assassination of Rev Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. Every soon to be voter should take the quiz at (<http://www.naacp.org/pages/quiz>) about Voting Rights (1950 or 2015?)

History Channel - Civil Rights Movement

<http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement>

The history channel has a very good collection of information, documentation, and videos from the time of the Civil Rights Movement.

Emily Post

<http://emilypost.com/>

Have an upcoming dance or celebration and want to make a splash with some new manners? Check out the library of books available from the Emily Post family. Evidently, they can even teach you which fork is used for which foods the next time you dine at Downton Abbey. Sounds like advice we can all benefit from.

