

Clarence Brown brings 'uplifting' drama to campus

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A couch sat center stage, surrounded by odds and ends that gave the illusion of a living room.

Quilts and bookshelves reminiscent of grandparents' homes lined the side of the stage, creating a welcoming, cozy feel.

This scene, set in the Clarence Brown Carousel Theatre, provided the background for the venue's current running play, "4000 Miles."

The play tells the story of a young Millennial, Leo, and his aging grandmother, Vera, as they both deal with conflicting hardships: Vera's oncoming Alzheimer's, Leo's best friend's recent death and the struggles that arise in the aftermath of both.

After Leo finishes a cross-country bike trip, he ends up at his grandmother's New York City apartment and staying a couple of days turns into a month of the duo working through their newfound difficulties and growing closer and closer through arguments, heart-to-hearts and understood agreements.

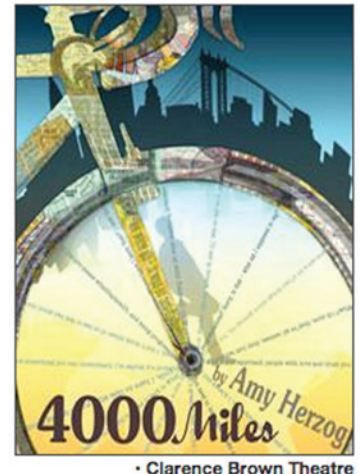
Carol Mayo Jenkins, a UT theatre professor, played Vera and was the shining star of the show. Jenkins' quick wit and sass was on par with that of any 90-year-old lady still fighting to live on her own. She kept up her Communist beliefs, smoked weed and still provided the loving guidance Leo needed after his tragedy. Jenkins ability to convey all these facets of Vera and snap from one to the next displayed her versatility as an actress that kept the play fresh and unexpected.

Steve Sherman, a MFA Acting candidate at UT, surprised in his role as Leo. At first, the character was annoying. Leo seemed like an over-the-top caricature of Millennials. However, as the play progressed, I realized that's exactly how us Millennials are: absolutely dramatic versions of ourselves. This realization, while still making the generation as a whole feel completely melodramatic, turned Leo into a lovable character that college students should be able to relate to and sympathize with as he battles with the loss of his best friend and the struggle of figuring out what he'll do next with his life.

The play could have been a tear-jerking drama with the occasional heartfelt moments to keep the audience from leaving completely overwhelmed. Instead, humor, drama and warm, fuzzy feelings mixed to make the play uplifting even as the pair prepares to attend a funeral in the last scene.

With only four acting characters in all and a single, unchanging set, the play could have easily fell to the wayside and never lived up to it's full potential. Yet, because of the playful and emotional dialogue and the range of emotions the cast was able to bring to the stage, the play was a standout performance.

The play will continue through Sun. Nov. 16.



Clarence Brown Theatre

4,000 Miles