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Actors Excel In BLT's 'On Golden Pond'

By Carol Hamann
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Is there a handyman in the house? The Thayers are having trouble with their screen door, whose thingamabob keeps falling out of the hinge.

This is just one of the dilemmas confronting the characters in Brevard Little Theatre's current production of "On Golden Pond" by Ernest Thompson. The Feb. 9-25 weekend run of the 1979 Broadway and Hollywood favorite brings frustration and laughter to audiences, as they recall similar experiences in their own lives. A four-day-early preview of

the show gives a telling glimpse of what lies ahead.

Following a preshow selection of appropriate late 1970s music, the curtain opens on an awe-inspiring set. Deep reds and warm earth tones give inviting ambience to the rustic Maine cabin in which the entire adventures take place. The striking contrast of three green mismatched doors bears witness to the fact that Norman and Ethel have been coming here for 48 years, and in that time, changes have been made. Designer, builders, painters and decorators of the set are to be congratulated.

Complementing the beauty of the set, actors bring the story to life. As a group, they display an amazing array of talent. From seasoned veterans to rank beginner, they all show determination and cooperation in creating the best performance that they know how.

Jack McConnell succeeds in capturing the stoic, non-nonsense persona of Norman, professor emeritus and speaker of perfect English. Even when he cracks his frequent, clever jokes, he does so with a straight face. His most animated scene is when he's alone with Bill, and they discuss sex.

Bonnie Clark, as Ethel, owns the stage whenever she's on it, which is nearly the entire show. She masters the art of becoming the heroine every minute of every scene. Always busy, her hands, body and facial expressions show that she's Ethel, not Bonnie. Hats off to her!

Heather Snipes gives another outstanding performance. Her unique ability to enliven those on stage with her testifies to the depth of passion she feels as Chelsea, the abused victim of her father's control. Her scene with Ethel is the best and most dramatic of the play.

Wharton Donaldson nails the comedic laugh of Charlie, the mailman. His simplicity and common-sense contrast with Norman, who considers him inferior. It's a good, solid, first-time performance.

Doug Denton, as Bill Ray, develops from shy outsider to strong contender against Norman, who tries to outwit him. When the two clash, Bill displays a crescendo of verbiage, which should earn him audience applause. Doug excels in the role, truly embodying the character he portrays.

Alex Guazzo looms large as the 13-year-old who steals the hearts of his soon-to-be grandparents. Billy's most endearing scene occurs while crouched behind a chair, sack of stolen cookies in hand, where he delivers a loon call better than the one from sound effects.

Thanks to lighting and sound effects people, the stage is well-lit or dimmed, as needed, and the motorboat sounds as if it's coming right up the center aisle. Director Bonnie Whitmire and stage manager Lyn O'Hare have guided this troupe of thespians to speak up, stay in the play and live their parts.

They've done these jobs well, and the community will do well to take in this play.

The remaining performances at 55 E. Jordan St. are Feb. 16, 17, 18, 23, 24 and 25 with 7:30 p.m. curtains on Friday and Saturday and 3 p.m. matinees on Sunday.