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'Voice of the Prairie' harks back to early radio days

August 29, 2015, 05:00 AM By [Judy Richter](#) Daily Journal

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A farmer becomes a celebrity by telling stories to early radio audiences in John Oliver's "The Voice of the Prairie," presented by Dragon Productions.

Davey Quinn (Robert Sean Campbell), an orphan, apparently inherited his story-telling ability from the 70-year-old Irish relative who looks after him. After the man dies in 1895, young Davey has only his wits to help him survive.

Taking to the road, he rescues a young blind girl, Frankie (Maria Giere Marquis), from her abusive father. She becomes his companion, riding the rails and sharing great adventures for several months before they're inadvertently separated.

Some years later, Davey has become a farmer who talks to friends about those adventures. A slick New Yorker, Leon Schwab (Tom Gough), overhears him and convinces him to tell his stories on Leon's pioneering radio station, which he also uses to sell radios.

Davey becomes famous and is reunited with Frankie in 1923 just as Leon is in trouble with the Federal Communications Commission for broadcasting without a license.

The story jumps back and forth as Gough and Marquis portray other characters. Gough carries the heaviest load. In one scene he's Leon, in another he's James, the asthmatic Methodist minister who wants to marry Frankie.

He's also seen as Davey's relative, Frankie's father, a sheriff and a loutish farmer. He's terrific in all these roles.

Directed by Dragon's founder and artistic director, Meredith Hagedorn, this production starts slowly as Davey's relative, Poppy, tells a story. His narrative is often interrupted by Davey's high-pitched giggles, which become off-putting because they're repeated so often.

The pace gradually picks up during the first act, and the second act, which takes place mainly in 1923, becomes more rewarding and satisfying.

Aside from his early scenes with Poppy, Campbell makes a likable Davey, whose life is forever altered through his adventures with Frankie. For her part, Marquis is convincing as the blind Frankie, making her a strong, resolute character.

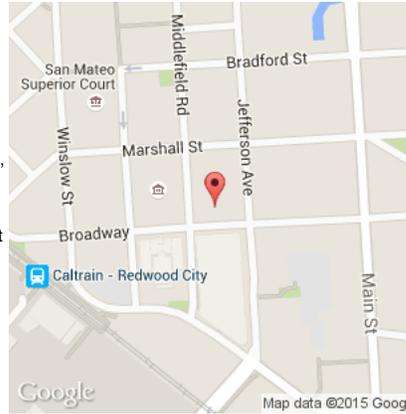
This three-actor play is well suited to Dragon's intimate space. The simple set by Jesse Ploog, lighting by Jeff Swan, costumes by Brooke Jennings and sound by Martyn Jones facilitate the action. Mostly it's the skill of the playwright and the talent of the actors that fill in the details of time and place.

"The Voice of the Prairie" runs just under two and a half hours with one intermission.

It continues through Sept. 13 at Dragon Theatre, 2120 Broadway, Redwood City. For tickets and information call (650) 493-2006 or visit www.dragonproductions.net.



James Kasyan
 Robert Sean Campbell and Maria Giere Marquis star in 'Voice of the Prairie.'



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