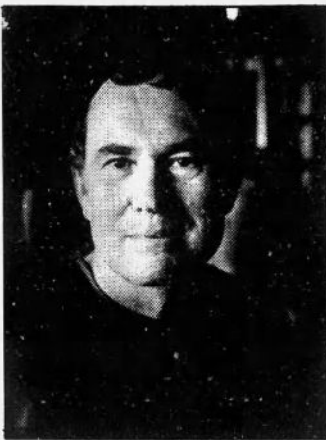


STAGE



Joe Frank: "There will be wild moments, thoughtful, frenetic, reflective and quiet moments."

CRITICAL CROSSFIRE: John Olive's "The Voice of the Prairie," a gentle drama of radio storytelling in an earlier era, is playing at the Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys. Bob Clark directs Rachel Babcock, Gretchen Corbett, Ronny Cox, Barry Gordon, John M. Johnson, Dick O'Neill and Bobby Zamoski.

The Times' Sylvie Drake found "a Frank Capra play—in tone, not derivation. Olive owns it exclusively. It may not be much more than a deft and witty valentine to a pioneer spirit and to the value of words, but that suffices. It's fun, it has a knowing heart and a voice to delight all within earshot."

Said the L.A. Reader's Susan Armine: "Olive's expertly crafted story of a sweet-but-slippery entrepreneur and the shy tale spinner whom he makes a star is humorous, nostalgic, educational, deeply mov-

ing. Clark's brisk direction and a first-rate cast show how imagination and reality can become inseparable over the airwaves and in our lives."

From Kathleen O'Steen in Daily Variety: "Clark has carefully crafted a production that adheres to the spirit [of radio's early days], reaching out to its audiences through sterling character portrayals and moments of sentiment that never stray beyond endurable bounds. The unaffected manner in which the stories are told and overlap is to this show's credit."

The Daily News' Tom Jacobs disagreed. "Olive delights us on occasion with some nice, poetic dialogue. But telling two equally balanced stories presents some problems he has not solved . . . In the hands of Clark, it comes across as an occasionally inspired, often banal play that is in need of some editing and reshaping."

Noted Drama-Logue's Richard Scaffidi: "'Voice' seems at first to

be merely a pleasant little play, but gradually one becomes aware that a deeper chord is being touched. There is a metamorphosis from quaintness and cornfield humor into stirring folklore. It's the difference between hayseed caricatures and heartland characters, between a plot and a tale."

And from Ed Kaufman in the Hollywood Reporter: "'Voice of the Prairie' is a rare gem of a show, one that is touching and tender. It's also full of the awe and mystery of an early America that still had a sense of innocence and wonder about things . . . The entire cast is absolutely wonderful." □

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