

Strong performance of *Steel Magnolias* draws tears

By CHRISTIAN CONTI
OLD GOLD AND BLACK REVIEWER

After drying my eyes on my shirt for the fifth or sixth time, I realized just how powerful a show *Steel Magnolias* is. It is a poignant piece about the true values of family and good friends in times of hardship that pulls at one's heartstrings.

It was written by Robert Harding and directed by sophomore Drew Droege, a member of the Anthony Aston Players. The production played Nov. 21-24.

Though it is a relatively simple show with only six cast members and no set changes, it was still one of the most overwhelming pieces ever produced in the Ring Theatre.

The story takes place in the garage-turned beauty shop run by Truvy (senior Julie Aitcheson) in Chinquapin, La. The show opens on the wedding day of Shelby (sophomore Catherine Justice) as she and her mother M'Lynn (sophomore Cecilia Pressley) are having their hair done.

Also present are the new hairdresser, Anelle (sophomore Tamara Payden-Travers), the sweet and rich

Miss Clairee (junior S. Lilly Bekele) and the crotchety Ouiser (senior Katherine Brewer).

The play then traces the life of these friends over the next two years, with Shelby serving as the foundation of the plot. It is her trials and tribulations that bring out the wide range of powerful emotions in each of the characters.

It is clear that Aitcheson was born to play the role of Truvy. She was the perfect choice by Droege to create a lively and powerful character. Her interaction with the rest of the cast was a pleasure in itself to watch.

Payden-Travers was able to convey the difficult spectrum of personalities that make up Anelle. She easily transformed herself from a shy and scared young woman to a more confident member of society and finally into the religious woman that she found within herself.

All of these stages of her character's growth are carried off very convincingly.

Clairee was wonderfully portrayed by Bekele. She created a character that exuded warmth and caring without sacrificing her wit. She provided a contrast to Ouiser, and she shared some great interaction with her.

The character of Shelby is extremely difficult to play. One of the hardest parts is the diabetic seizure in the first scene.

Justice was more than ready for the challenge, and she created an energetic and charismatic figure of a woman who refused to let illness dampen her quest for happiness in her life.



Kristin Thompson

Truvy, senior Julie Aitcheson, works diligently on Shelby's, sophomore Catherine Justice, hair in *Steel Magnolias*.

On stage, standing alone, Pressley made a great M'Lynn. She had the strength of character and the ability to create the overwhelming range of emotions necessary to portray a mother's feelings about her child's death.

Unfortunately, she did choose to

stand alone. Her lack of viable interaction with her fellow cast members took a considerable amount away from her performance. She seemed at a few points to be disconnected from the rest of the show.

The part of Ouiser was masterfully

played by Brewer. She was able to create one of the most stubborn and bitter characters ever to perform on stage, and yet also revealed a softer side that had been hidden in the character for decades. In many respects, she stole the show with her humor and her superior ability to interact with the other members of the scene, whether she was speaking or not.

Droege did an incredible job in his directing. It was clear that he had a great deal of time with each actress, carefully developing her character. The result was a powerful, emotional roller coaster that managed not to leave a dry eye in the house.

The lighting design by junior Edwin Howard helped set the mood, especially for the second scene in Act I. His choices for design were conservative, but powerful in their simplicity.

One of the most noticeable aspects of this production was the hairdos sported by each of the actresses. The different styles accurately defined the personalities of their respective characters. The credit for these creations goes to hair designer junior Nicole Baldwin.

The other important and well-presented facet of the characters' appearances were their costumes, designed by senior Aimee Mackovic.

These outfits did an excellent job of managing to convey the loud style of Truvy and the quiet and sophisticated tastes of M'Lynn.

The set design by sophomore Jimmy Hilburn fit the play perfectly. The green chairs and the Christmas decorations in the first act spoke vol-

umes both about Truvy and tastes as a whole.

Hilburn managed to fit a fully equipped beauty parlor in to the small space provided without making it seem overcrowded and cluttered.

Finally, the sound designed by sophomore James Buescher set the mood before each scene. Lost in the quiet melody of a country tune, the audience found it easier to transport itself to a small rural town in Louisiana.

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His selections were well chosen and helped in the overall creation of a suspension of disbelief.

Overall, I found the production to be extremely powerful. Through the course of the play, I found myself transported through the full range of emotions.

It was hands down one of the most moving shows that I have ever seen in my life.



Courtesy of Secret Artist Series

Coming Soon

Paul Hiller's *Theatre of Voices* will perform as part of the Secret Artist Series Friday at 8 p.m. in Wait Chapel.

A doctor is needed for *The English Patient*

By JUSTIN PETERSON
CONTRIBUTING REVIEWER

The time between Thanksgiving and Christmas has traditionally meant one thing for Hollywood: get your Oscar contenders out now, so that they qualify for the year's upcoming Academy Awards as well as remain fresh in the minds of critics when it comes time to vote. This year is no exception.

Along with Oscar hopefuls like *The Crucible*, and the smaller (but no less acclaimed) *Shine*, comes Miramax Films' latest entry — *The English Patient*.

This epic romance is an adaptation of Michael Ondaatje's 1992 Booker Prize winning novel of the same name, and is generating extremely good buzz with critics. What kind of noise it makes at Oscar time, or just how much, is yet to be seen.

Set in 1937 and 1944, at the beginning and end of World War II, *The English Patient* is a grandiose film that is actually a tale within a tale. The "English patient" of the film's title is the survivor of a plane crash over the Sahara desert. Horribly burned and having lost his memory in the crash, his identity is a mystery. Also unknown is the identity of the plane's other occupant — a woman who died in the crash. Enter Hana (Juliette Binoche), a WWII nurse desperately trying to hold onto something, or someone, in

the war's aftermath. Making a connection between her suffering and that of the "English patient," Hana volunteers to stay and take care of him in an Italian monastery.

It is in this abandoned monastery that we begin to find out just who the English patient really is, and how he came to be in his present state. His memory sparked by readings of his most treasured possession — a volume of Herodotus — the patient begins a series of flashbacks to the beginning of the war. No Englishman at all, the patient is actually the Hungarian Count Laszlo de Almasy.

Another part of the story involves the Ralph Fiennes character, who meets Katharine (Kristin Scott-Thomas), the wife of a new expedition member, and cautiously falls for her. Eventually the two fall deeply into a love that borders on obsession. Their affair is inevitable.

Without giving away any of the film's surprises, it is sufficient to say that Almasy's past does not end there. Things are complicated with the arrival of Caravaggio (Willem Dafoe), a Canadian war vet who claims that this "English patient" is far more sinister than he seems. Hana does not know what to make of

these accusations, but never falters in her care for her patient. Bit by bit, Almasy remembers more, and the pieces fall into place until we have come full circle back to the original plane crash. This time, though, we look on the crash with a new understanding.

The English Patient seems to have all the ingredients for a perfect movie. Start with an award-winning novel. Enter a producer with experience in literary adaptations. Saul Zaentz definitely fits that bill, having succeeded in adapting *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Amadeus* for the big screen. Writer-director Anthony Minghella is an accomplished British playwright whose directorial debut, *Truly, Madly, Deeply*, was a critical success. And who better than a playwright to write screenplay?

However, in the case of book to film adaptations, no matter how faithful the movie tries to be, something is always lost in the translation. I have a feeling that the complexity and length Ondaatje's novel made it necessary for Minghella to leave out quite a bit. As a result, *The English Patient* suffers where it is most important for it to succeed — in the relationship between Almasy and Katharine.

Both Fiennes (who gave great performances in *Schindler's List* and *Quiz Show*) and Scott-Thomas (*Mission: Impossible*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*)

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BLOOD BROTHERS PROVIDES LOOK AT SPRINGSTEEN IN THE STUDIO

By ZACH EVERSON
ASSISTANT NEWS EDITOR

Very rarely does an artist allow the public to witness the creative process. For no one was that more true than for Bruce Springsteen.

In *Blood Brothers*, however, a 90 minute documentary packaged with a five track CD, Springsteen and the E Street Band open the studio doors and invite the masses to witness their first recording sessions in over 10 years.

The purpose of Springsteen's reunion with his longtime collaborators was to record new songs to be included on his 1995 *Greatest Hits* album.

Blood Brothers, which originally aired last spring on The Disney Channel, is well worth a look for both the diehard Springsteen tramp as well as the casual music fan who is simply interested in a behind the scenes look at what goes on in the studio. It does have its problems, however, as many questions are left unanswered.

From the onset, it is obvious that the members of the band feel a close sense of camaraderie.

Despite Springsteen's notifying the musicians of his intention to hit the studio only a few days in advance, they all dropped what they were doing to join him. "He called everybody last Thursday night and everybody was here on Monday," said Jon Landau, Springsteen's longtime manager.

This spontaneity carries over to Springsteen's instructing the band how to play the songs that he has written. The band members would sit around with legal pads and take notes as Springsteen would sing and play either the guitar or piano.

After the group session, he would meet individually with each band member and go over his vision of their part in the song. "The funny part is, in his striving for spontaneity, he often will not tell you what key you're going to play in, what song you're going to do: 'just follow me boys,'" said Garry Tallent,

the bassist for The E Street band.

The documentary emphasizes the recording of "Blood Brothers" and "Secret Garden," as well as the video shoot for "Murder Incorporated" (an event that took place several weeks after the recording sessions, yet is presented on the documentary as if it happened in the middle of the sessions).

The footage pertaining to "Secret Garden" was the most revealing portion of the video. After recording a version of the song that was acceptable, Springsteen and his entourage brought in an outsider to add an orchestral sound to the song.

When the new version is presented to Springsteen, he seems to be really impressed with it, even embracing David Kahne, who composed the new arrangement on the computer.

A vote is then taken by Springsteen and his advisers as to whether or not they should use the orchestral arrangement. The vote was overwhelmingly in favor of using it.

In a bombastic speech that may have been alcohol-induced (he was seen knocking back a few beers just moments earlier) Springsteen expresses some reservations about using the new arrangement.

The final version of "Secret Garden" that appears on *Greatest Hits* is the one without the strings in the background. The orchestral arrangement was released as a b-side to the single.

It is interesting to see the impact that other people have on Springsteen. "He kinda takes in everyone's advice and everybody's comments and then figures out what he wants," said Bob Clearmountain, who mixed the song.

The CD contains the versions of "Blood Brothers" and "Secret Garden" that were not used on the *Greatest Hits*, and the video version of "Murder Incorporated." Two songs that are not given much time on the video, "High Hopes" and "Without You," round out the CD.

Your Arms Again." The video shows the recording of the song, but unlike all of the other songs shown on the documentary, it is not on either the *Greatest Hits* or the *Blood Brothers* CDs.

During the recording sessions it appears that the song was originally supposed to be included on *Greatest Hits*. Not only is "Back in Your Arms Again" the strongest of all of the new material, but it ranks among Springsteen's best love songs ever. Rumor has it, however, that the song is being saved for a future album.

Although I realize it is impossible to squeeze a couple days of recording into a 90 minute segment, I was left with numerous questions.

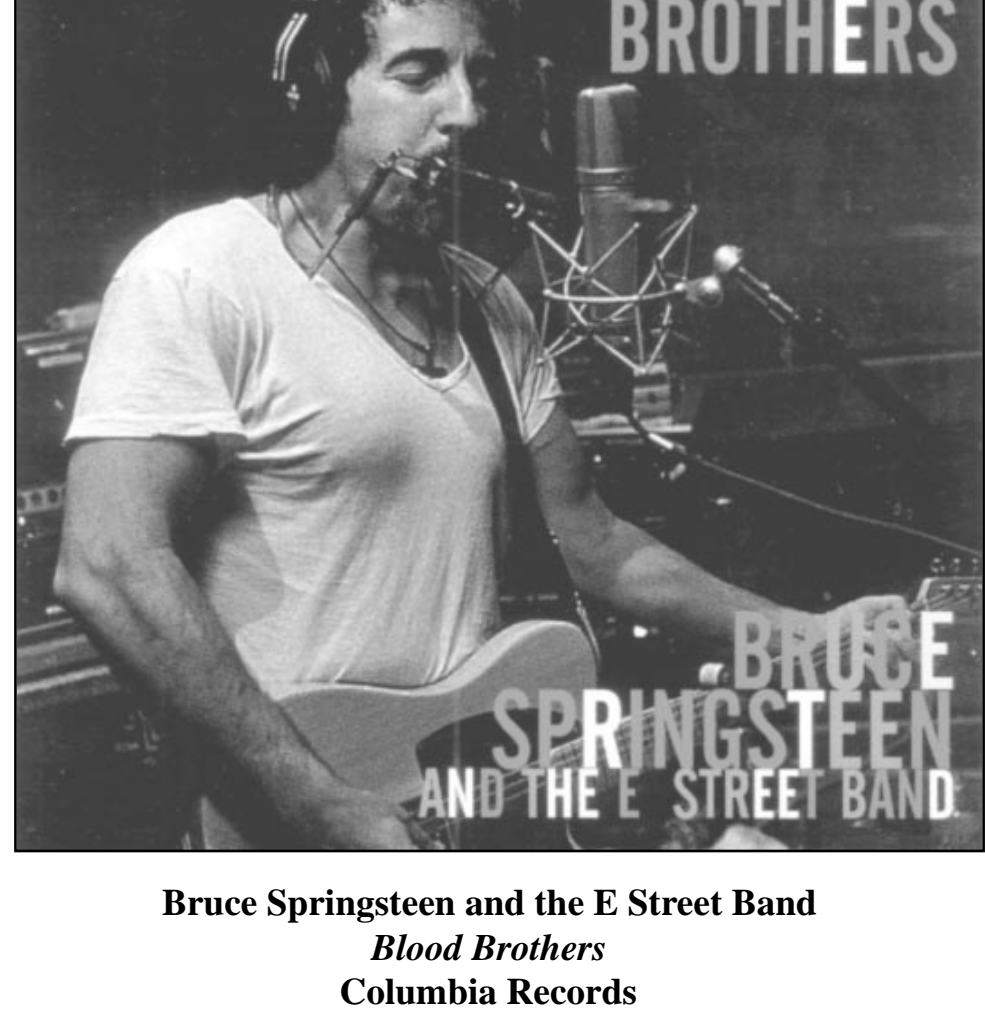
It was never really explained how the songs for the *Greatest Hits* album were chosen. *Greatest Hits* emphasized his best selling album, *Born in the USA*, but did not include any songs from his first two albums, as well as neglecting a number of fan favorites such as "The Promised Land," "Tunnel of Love" and "Darkness on the Edge of Town."

It would have been interesting to find out the reasoning behind deciding what songs were to be included.

Finally, little time is spent examining the emotions of the band members getting back together. Supposedly the E Streeters who had devoted their entire adult lives to Springsteen's music were suddenly left in the cold, as Springsteen toured and recorded with other less talented musicians.

Max Weinberg, the drummer of E Street (and currently the band leader for "Late Night with Conan O'Brien"), expressed his disappointment with the break-up as he realized that he would no longer be playing the music that had been such an integral part of his adult life.

Chuck Plotkin, one of the Springsteen's producers, admitted to being apprehensive about the reunion as he was afraid it would fail. Other than Weinberg and Plotkin, however, no one expresses his feelings about



Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band
Blood Brothers
Columbia Records

being left out in the cold by the person who some E Streeters referred to as "The Man Who Wouldn't Be Boss."

Despite the aforementioned problems, the vantage point *Blood Brothers* provides makes

the video well worth viewing, regardless of one's musical taste. More musicians should follow Springsteen's lead and allow the public to see the process involved in recording the songs that have such an impact on our lives.