

# Review: Take Me Back to Jefferson

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**Web URL:** <http://www.mooneyontheatre.com/2014/11/08/review-take-me-back-to-jefferson-theatre-smith-gilmour/>

## **As I Lay Dying, at Factory Theatre, Deserves its Acclaim**

In celebration of [Factory Theatre](#)'s 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary, [Theatre Smith-Gilmour](#) has revived their Dora nominated production, [Take Me Back to Jefferson](#) (formerly billed as [As I Lay Dying](#), the title of the 1930 [William Faulkner](#) novel on which this production is based).

It's a morbid, touching look at the Bundren family's attempt at honouring the death of their matriarch and their emotionally volatile journey to return her body to the town of Jefferson, her hometown and desired final resting place.

As a theatrical adaptation of the original, Take Me Back to Jefferson remains fairly true to its inspiration, and I was quite satisfied to note that all the key developments I found to be integral to the novel's plotline were faithful to what I remember.

*(Disclaimer: I last read the novel during my university days, roughly 4 years ago).*

At the core of this piece, we still have the tale of a blissfully ignorant and selfish father who drives his children forward through harrowing experiences, but at the cost of their sanity and cohesiveness as a family.

In Faulkner's work, this story was told through the perspectives of 15 different characters. Here, this number was cut by more than half. It's a choice I wholeheartedly agree with, given the fact that this play's runtime is approximately 140 minutes. This provided a more streamlined retelling of the novel, without losing any of its descriptive charm.

The team of Michele Smith and Dean Gilmour was able to take the alluring, vivid descriptions contained within the novel and translated them into strong piece that effortlessly combines dialogue and movement to tell a compelling narrative.

The way the actors moved effortless about the stage made for quite a memorable performance. I was particularly enamoured with the minimalist use of props. Instead of relying on inanimate objects to set the scene, the actors perfectly pantomimed the vivid and descriptive text of the novel.

The result was an imaginative and visually stunning performance. In particular, I found Ben Muir's (playing the family wild child, Jewel) pantomime work depicting taming a riding a hard-headed stallion to be perfectly on-point.

Normally, I would share my thoughts in my own words, but in this case, this Michael Ondaatje quote from the show program really does say it best:

*You will swear you have seen live horses and rivers in flood and barns on fire as well as the strangest and most heartbreaking family.*

But that is not to detract from the strength of the other performances. I loved the innocent charm of Daniel Robert's portray of the family's youngest child, Vardaman; the inspiring elegance of family matriarch Addie, played by Michele Smith; the charm and poise of the only daughter, Dewy Dell, played by Nina Gilmour; and the machismo of the eager-to-please son, Cash, played by Dan Watson.

But for me the standout stars of the evening were Dean Gilmour and Julian De Zotti: Gilmour for being able to play such a loathsome yet likeable anti-hero and De Zanotti for his wide theatrical range – perfectly transitioning between the most rational family member and a tragically insane martyr.

It really was the acting that made this such a memorable piece for me. This wasn't amateur hour. This was a collection of seasoned professionals doing what they do best – creating a world on stage all their own and effortlessly drawing the audience in.

I can honestly see why this piece garnered its 4 Dora nominations. Go see this play.

#### **Details:**

- [Take Me Back to Jefferson](#) is playing from November 5<sup>th</sup> until November 23<sup>rd</sup> at the [Factory Theatre Mainstage](#) (125 Bathurst Street). Runtime is 140 minutes with a brief intermission.
- Show times including Tuesday to Saturday performances at 8:00 PM, as well as Sunday matinees at 2:00 PM. For a full listing of show dates, [click here](#).
- Tickets cost \$35 during the week, \$45 on Saturdays and \$40 for Sunday showings. Student, senior and art worker discounts are available.
- Tickets may be purchased in person at the Factory Theatre box office, by calling 416-504-9971 or [online](#).

Photography by Katherine Fleitas.