

Theater Review: Romance blossoms despite the odds in 'Last Train'

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Some say that the best stories are the simplest ones because they go straight to the heart without distractions along the way. Perhaps that explains why Arlene Hutton's "Last Train to Nibroc" warms the cockles and lingers in memory

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Actor's Theatre of San Antonio is producing this gentle, two-character play for a three-weekend run at the Cameo Theatre. Kathleen Lovejoy is the sensitive director, while two talented young actors make us believe that romance — even for the most callow innocents — can bloom despite all manner of unforeseen blows.

Erin Bendele and Kerry Valderrama portray May and Raleigh, who meet in 1940 on an east-bound train outside Chicago, but must wait more than two years before their destinies are fulfilled. Both are unsophisticated mountain folk from neighboring Kentucky towns and both have had recent setbacks. She's returning from a painful visit with a now-former fiancé; he's just been discharged from the Army because he is epileptic.

As they talk — and talk is what drives this piece — it is obvious that they are very different. She is religious and has considered becoming a missionary, while he hopes to become a writer. He has been to the annual Nibroc festival in her town of Corbin, but she has always attended the tent revival that takes place at the same time.

A bumpy relationship ensues, with each enduring disappointment, trauma and inevitable emotional growth until the story reaches its conclusion.

For this beautifully structured, plainspoken play, Lovejoy keeps her blocking appropriately simple, dovetailing nicely with Don Fox's minimalist set. Along with a backdrop screen, it consists solely of double seats in each of the three scenes: train seats, a park bench and a porch settee.

"Last Train to Nibroc" can be seen at 8 p.m. Fridays and 7:30 p.m. Saturdays through Jan. 21 with a single matinee at 2:30 p.m. Jan. 22 at the Cameo Theatre, 1123 E. Commerce St. Tickets cost \$14-\$18. Call (210) 472-2636 for reservations. Group rates available.

CAMEO CENTER

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