

# Morrie enlivens

## Endearing tale of friendship rekindled has plenty of heart



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Chances are, it would take a month of Sundays to find another play as gently moving as Tuesdays with Morrie.

Adapted from Mitch Albom's bestselling memoir of the same title by Jeffrey Hatcher, the stage version of Tuesdays opened, fittingly enough, on Tuesday on the stage of the Winter Garden Theatre, a production of the Harold Green Jewish Theatre, where it will run through May 31.

For the uninitiated -- those who have managed to avoid all the hype about the book, the Broadway play and the subsequent TV movie -- Tuesdays with Morrie documents the relationship between Morrie Schwartz, a real-life sociology prof, and Mitch Albom, one of his students at Brandeis University, which is where the relationship begins.

Having formed a bond with his prof, a young Mitch graduates, spends some time in New York finding himself, and ends up a successful sports writer in Detroit, which is where he stumbles across a television interview with his old prof, who has been diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, more commonly known as ALS or Lou Gehrig's Disease.

Overcome with guilt for letting the relationship die, Mitch reconnects with his old friend and the two fall into a weekly pattern of contact again until it all comes to a tragic and inevitable end.

At least, that's the way most people might tell the story going in, but the remarkable thing about Hatcher's adaptation of Albom's book is that it isn't as much about dying as you might think, but rather about finding the courage to live.

And that's what this production, helmed by Ted Dykstra and featuring the redoubtable Hal Linden (as Schwartz) and Rick Roberts (as Albom) drives home.

It's all presented as a memory play of sorts, with Robert's Albom serving as host on a set of almost otherworldly simplicity created by Phillip Silver, beautifully lit by Bonnie Beecher.

That simplicity is deceptive however, and Silver's set proves remarkably adaptable as the friendship between teacher and student is rekindled in an extended course in the humanities.

As Morrie, Linden is virtually flawless, navigating his way through a veritable minefield of cliches to create a character that is loveable, but still human, stopping just shy of the kind of tear-jerking sainthood that could make this show all but unbearable.

And while the play is blessedly somewhat sketchy on the finer points of this horrific disease, Linden nonetheless does a convincing job on the physical arc the playwright has sketched for the character.

Meanwhile, Roberts' arc is more of a mental and emotional nature, and despite a few opening-night technical glitches (enough, frankly, to suggest that somewhere in his past, he's seriously offended the god of gadgets), he does a bang-up job.

Under Dykstra's tutelage, this is a perfectly modulated performance through which a fortunate audience is able to experience the full measure of Mitch's growth and the full tragedy of his loss.

Friday may be your favourite day of the week, but you should be aware, nonetheless that Tuesdays with Morrie is a lovely little play with a big, big heart.

New season

Native Earth has announced plans for another season of ground-breaking aboriginal theatre. Their 2009-2010 season kicks off in the fall with a work-shop production of Saltbaby, written by Falen Johnson and directed by Yvette Nolan on the Theatre Passe Muraille Backspace stage. The 22nd annual version of Weesageechak Begins to Dance follows in January on the TPM mainstage, while Giiwedín, a new opera by Spy Denomme-Welch and Catherine Magowan is slated for the same space in April, in a co-production with An Indie(n) Rights Reserve. For further info, call 416-531-1402.

Rock You to close June 29

Mirvish Productions have announced that their production of We Will Rock You will close June 29, 2009, at the Panasonic Theatre.

\$18 on the 18th for Doubt

The Canadian Stage Company has announced that all tickets for the May 18 performance of Doubt (at the Bluma Appel) will be priced at \$18. Visit [canstage.com](http://canstage.com) or call 416-368-3110.

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TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE

At the Winter Garden Theatre

Starring: Hal Linden and Rick Roberts

Director: Ted Dykstra

Sun Rating: 4 1/2 out of 5