

Bas Bleu tackles classic with class

By **STACY NICK**
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Before you even see Willy Loman enter the stage, you hear his feet shuffling across the driveway, you feel the heaviness of his valance, you know his weariness.

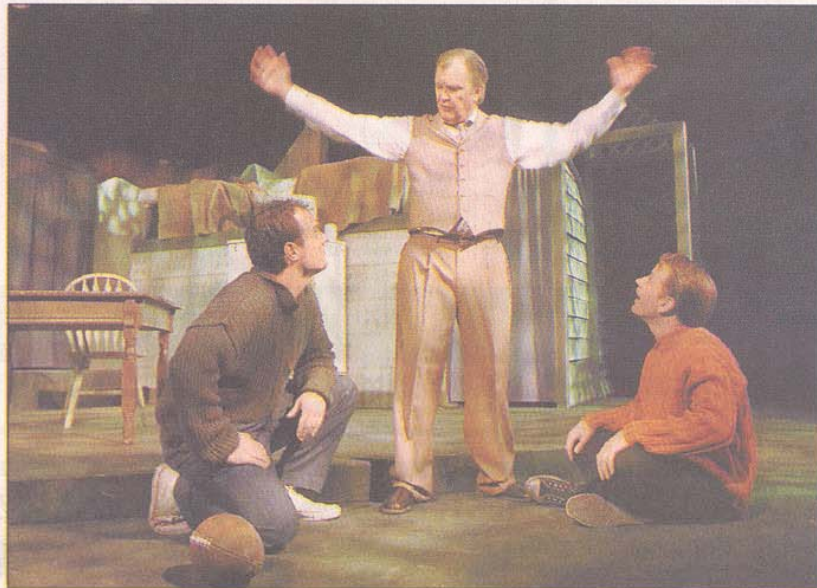
It's hard to take a highly revered theatrical production and make it your own. Especially a play like "Death of a Salesman," which in any given week is being performed somewhere in the world.

But Bas Bleu Theatre Company wasn't interested in reinventing the wheel when it decided to tackle this play.

Smart move. "Death" is a classic for a reason and any attempts to modernize it would have backfired. Instead Bas Bleu used meat-and-potatoes actors who are focused and connected to their characters. That, topped with excellent direction from Morris Burns, and you have one of the most satisfying plays of the theater season.

Like his character, Willy, actor Billy Thornton too carries a heavy load with this role of a lifetime, but plays his character effortlessly. As Thornton's character slips into dementia, his frustration as he struggles to hold on to his vision of reality radiates through the theatre.

Thornton plays his role with a reality not often seen on the stage. He pulls no punches and



Sherri Barber/The Coloradoan

TELLING TALES: Kurt Brighton as Biff Loman, left, and Gregory Adams as Happy Loman listen to their father, Willy Loman, played by Billy Thornton, as he tells them about his travels as a salesman during a rehearsal of 'Death of a Salesman.'

allows, in fact, encourages the audience to conversely dislike and yet pity his character.

Playing Loman's supportive wife, Linda, Frances Burns pushes her stage sons, and the audience, to see beyond Willy's

See **BAS BLEU/Page B9**

'Death of a Salesman'

■ **When:** 7:30 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays and 2:30 p.m. matinees Sundays through May 28

■ **Where:** Bas Bleu Theatre,

401 Pine St.

■ **Cost:** \$17 for adults, \$12 for seniors and \$10 for students

■ **Information and tickets:**

www.basbleu.org and 498-8949

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Bas Bleu

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obvious faults. Burns told me that in rehearsals she struggled not to cry at the closing funeral scene. This was not the case for me. In seeing her character strive to comprehend the suicide of the man she built her life around, I didn't even try to hold back tears. Pass the tissues, please.

Playing Loman's sons, Biff and Happy, Kurt Brighton and Gregory Adams easily encapsulate both the blind love and idolization children show their parents and the washed-up disillusionment of adulthood.

Brighton, who has appeared in several Bas Bleu productions, is great at expressing the internal battle going on within his character, from the rage Biff feels toward his father while still longing for his approval and some unrealized vision of "success."

Adams, who is new to Bas Bleu but not to theater, gives a wonderful debut performance as both a boy beating his brains out to get the attention of his father and a man who has learned to look for affection elsewhere.

At first appearance, Jon Whatley's performance as Willy's idolized brother, Ben, comes off like such an over-the-top Mr. Belvedere that you wonder what he's doing there.



Sherri Barber/The Coloradoan

DOTING: Linda Loman, played by Frances Burns, Willy Loman, played by Billy Thornton, in 'Death of a Salesman.'

During the play it irked me, but later I realized that's exactly what Whatley was going for.

In Willy's mind, Ben is almost God-like. To express that, especially as part of Willy's breakdown, it has to be done with a booming voice, a haughty per-

sonality and a towering presence — perfect for the 6-foot-4-inch Whatley. Looking back, there was no one else who could have nailed that role nearly as well.

Among the many debuting supporting cast, Nathan Young stood out. The Colorado State

University sophomore provided several light moments as the bumbling young Bernard. As the character grows up, so does Young's performance as a confident man witnessing the collapse of a family. Young is definitely one to watch as a rising new talent.