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# San Antonio Express-News

## Theater Review: Emotion honest, well-done in 'Golden Pond'

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If "sappy" is the first word that comes to mind when "On Golden Pond" comes up, think again.

The national touring production is refreshingly unsentimental and without so much as a trickle of sap. It's also frequently laugh-out-loud funny.

The show, which kicked off the 2006-07 season of the Broadway Across America — San Antonio series on Tuesday, is set over a single summer on the shore of Golden Pond in Maine. The elderly Thayers — crotchety Norman (Tom Bosley) and his patient wife, Ethel (Michael Learned) — have made their 48th annual trek to the lake.



The cast of "On Golden Pond," which opened Tuesday at the Majestic Theatre.

Nearing 80 and suffering occasional memory lapses, Norman is convinced he won't live to see another summer; Ethel seems just as convinced that he will, though she is worried enough about him to invite their only child to come for a visit. The subtext of her invitation is that Chelsea (Kate Levy) should finally make peace with her dad, with whom she has such a frosty relationship that she calls him by his first name.

Chelsea arrives with her new beau (Evan Pappas) and his tough-talking 13-year-old son, Billy (the terrific Shadoe Alan Brandt). Billy winds up spending the summer with Chelsea's folks, and taking care of him gives Norman a new lease on life.

That also allows him to open up a tiny bit when Chelsea, goaded by her mother, finally finds the nerve to reach out to him.



Tom Bosley and Michael Learned in a scene from "On Golden Pond."

Bosley and Learned both look much sturdier than Henry Fonda and Katharine Hepburn did in the 1981 movie version. Learned sprints effortlessly across the stage a few times in the show, and Bosley seems pretty spry, too.

They have great chemistry together, and each gives a sterling, honest performance. Learned paints a nuanced portrait of Ethel as a loving mate who will only tolerate so much coot-itude from her hubby. And Bosley nails every note as Norman, expertly delivering every joke while also suggesting Norman's carefully hidden fears.

The supporting cast — including Craig Bockhorn as the Thayers' mailman — is marvelous, as well.

The action plays out on a gorgeous set that includes a changing skyline behind the cabin.

The richly rewarding production is a great start to the new season.

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"On Golden Pond" can be seen at 8 p.m. today and Friday, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday and 2 and 7:30 p.m. Sunday at the Majestic Theatre, 224 E. Houston St. Tickets are available at Ticketmaster.