

# The Homecoming Review

By MARIAN WESTBROOK

Center Stage Theatre gave its audience a look at the trials and triumphs of a Depression-era family in its production of *The Homecoming*. This is the drama that led to the creation of the television series “The Waltons.” Cathy Stelly, assisted by Bridget Behrens, directed a cast of adults and children. The group gave four performances at Herman Park Center from Thursday through Sunday.

The play takes place in rural Virginia on Christmas Eve, 1933. It shows the hardships of the Spencer family: The father has to work some distance from home, and money is tight. Olivia Spencer is worried because her husband hasn’t returned and may be out in the snowstorm. Shirley Proctor performed well in her leading role of wife and mother.

Vincent Bridgers gave a sensitive portrayal of Clay-Boy, who serves as both narrator and actor. An imaginary conversation with his father reveals a conflict between the aspiring writer and the practical man. He thinks his father doesn’t understand him, but as he talks to neighbors and townspeople, he begins to see another side of Clay Spencer, and by the end of the play, the two are reconciled.

The first act of the drama lacked vigor, the second act was stronger. Effective scenes included bickering among the children, decorating the Christmas tree, and the distributing of gifts by the City Lady (Tracy Henthorn). Another delightful scene showed Clay-Boy being served spiked egg-nog by the Staple sisters (Susan Bowen and Mary Lou Park). And of course, the arrival of Clay Spencer (Keith Barnes) with his load of gifts was the high point of the drama.

Cheyenne Corbitt’s set, along with period costumes, evoked the ‘30s. It featured an old-fashioned kitchen with a wood stove, a long table with benches, and a back porch with coats hanging on hooks. Outside the house swirls of cotton on trees and ground created a snowy scene. The space on each side of the stage was used effectively for a pool hall, a church and a ladies’ parlor.

Christmas music added to the play’s charm. Recorded carols played before the show and during intermission. Ms. Proctor sang a sweet solo “What Child is This,” and an ensemble at a church service gave a strong rendition of “O, Holy Night.”