

# 'Oldest Living Graduate' is wonderful play, wonderfully done

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By **LAWSON TAITTE** / The Dallas Morning News  
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After 30-odd years, I remembered how funny *The Oldest Living Graduate* was. What I forgot is how touchingly poetic it is.

The Contemporary Theatre of Dallas opened the second installment of its ongoing revival of Preston Jones' Texas Trilogy on Friday. Known as The Bradleyville Trilogy when it premiered at the Dallas Theater Center in the early 1970s, the cycle went on to national acclaim and a Broadway run. *The Oldest Living Graduate* was always the strongest unit of the trilogy, and it gets a superior production here.

The key to the show's success is the title character, Col. J.C. Kinkaid. The Colonel hasn't been quite all there since returning shell-shocked from World War I. Now at an advanced age, he spends his life cussing anybody who gets in his way and re-telling old stories.

It's easy for an actor to get laughs in the role. For Contemporary, John S. Davies throws out lines with the waspish violence of Punch in a Punch and Judy show. He's pure id, and we love him for it.

But there's also a little bit of King Lear in the Colonel, and Mr. Davies does full justice to that side of the part as well. The Colonel is holding on tenaciously to a piece of land his entrepreneurial son Floyd wants to develop. Halfway between Willy Loman and Big Daddy, this doomed patriarch is one of the great characters in American drama. And he's Texan to the bone, of course.

A new director, Cynthia Hestand, has taken over this installment of the cycle. She beautifully balances the humor and the family drama. In the case of the two visitors from the military school the Colonel attended as a boy, she may even have turned the silliness down a notch or two too low.

The rest of the cast is terrific, though, particularly Russell DeGrazier as Floyd and Sue Loncar as his wife, Maureen. Mr. DeGrazier shows us every side of the dutiful but undervalued son, and we see the complexity of his tattered relationship with his wife. Ms. Loncar outdoes herself in giving us a subtle portrait of a frustrated, slightly embittered but still caring woman stultifying in small-town Texas.



REX C. CURRY/Special Contributor

**PLAN YOUR LIFE** Through June 29 at Contemporary Theatre of Dallas. Runs 120 mins. \$27 to \$32. 214-828-0094;  
[www.contemporarytheatreofdallas.com](http://www.contemporarytheatreofdallas.com)