

# 'Foxfire' spreads its warmth

Performances of "Foxfire," presented by Meadow Brook Theatre, continue through Sunday, Nov. 30, on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. For ticket information, call 377-3300.

By Cathie Breidenbach  
special writer

Meadow Brook Theatre's production of "Foxfire" is rich with the down-home humor and country wisdom of the tough Appalachian folk who've farmed Georgia's Blue Ridge Mountains for generations.

It's a worthy play sustained by the warmth and wit of its characters. Arthur Beer's masterful portrayal of the enigmatic ghost, Hector Nations, glows with naturalness and shows what hill-country integrity is really about.

Hector's been dead five years but he's alive in the imagination of his widow, Annie, who lives alone on the family's mountain-top farm.

In "Foxfire," old folks and old ways make way for a world where place and family are no longer the same. Annie must choose between loyalty to the land of her roots or to the living family that needs her.

SHE LONGS TO remain on the farm where Hector is, to be like foxfire, a lichen that hangs onto rotten wood and puts out a luminous glow. But the world moves on and Annie, strong unsentimental mountain woman that she is, moves with it.

**She longs to remain on the farm where Hector is, to be like Foxfire, a lichen that hangs onto rotten wood and puts out a luminous glow.**

Years of living bring their share of powerful feelings, but Mary Fogarty's portrayal of Annie doesn't always succeed in showing depth of feeling beneath her strength. In contrast, Arthur Beer's Hector reveals layers of believable feeling in the role originated by Hume Cronyn.

Like the Foxfire books that inspired the play, authors Susan Cooper and Hume Cronyn show an abiding respect for the indomitable character of Appalachian people like Annie and Hector Nations. Director Terence Kilburn never stoops to L'il Abner clichés.

One character, the Nations' son, Dillard, makes himself into a cliché as a glitzy country and western singer who "looks like an ice cream

soda" and sounds like a salesman. Paul Hopper as Dillard plays the role originated by Keith Carradine.

His songs show how far Dillard has come from the simple life and heartfelt tunes he once strummed on the porch at sunset. As an entertainer on the country and western circuit, he thumps raucous, crowd-pleasing music on his guitar and lives a transient, rootless lifestyle so different from his mountain upbringing.

JOSEPH REED excels as the greedy but likeable land developer who wants to buy off Annie Nations' land and turn it into a posh development of vacation homes. Donna Werner is also fine in the role of a

local girl who returns as a schoolteacher and wants to preserve the ageless wisdom in her Appalachian heritage.

The wonderfully detailed set by Peter Hicks anchors the tale in nostalgia for the rustic beauty of the homestead called Stony Lanesome. A weatherbeaten frame house, stone fences 'round the orchard, rocking chairs in the yard, all the details of a way of life that only the old ones remember.

Cathie Breidenbach of West Bloomfield has always loved theater. A former high-school English teacher, she works in public relations, advertising and as a freelance writer.



**Cathie Breidenbach**



Mary Fogarty, a star of a TV daytime drama, plays an elderly widow and Arthur Beer, an actor-director, is her husband in the Detroit-area premiere of "Foxfire" at Meadow Brook Theatre.

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