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Ann

by Winnie McCroy
EDGE Editor
Tuesday Mar 19, 2013



Actress Holland Taylor is an absolute delight as former Texas Governor Ann Richards in the new play "Ann," now running at Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont Theater. In a white skirt suit with a glittering Lone Star pin on her lapel, Taylor brings to life a celebrated political personality.

For those unfamiliar with the legislator, who passed away in September 2006 from cancer, Richards was the second female governor of Texas. (The first was a Depression Era stand-in for her husband.) Formerly the state treasurer, Richards first came into the wide public eye when she delivered the keynote address at the 1988 Democratic National Convention.

Among Richards' choice bon mots during that speech were jibes at then Vice-President George H. Bush's apathy and public speaking blunders, saying, "Poor George, he can't help it. He was born with a silver foot in his mouth."

Yes, Richards was a Democrat, a woman, divorced and a recovering alcoholic when she was elected to represent Texas as governor. Her no-nonsense messages were delivered with a wry humor, irreverence and a soft Texas drawl, and she accomplished much, including prison reform, protections for children and the elderly and a ban on concealed weapons, before she was defeated in 1994 by George W. Bush.

"We had rung a bell they could never unring," said Taylor as Richards. "I had promised to put together a government that looked like the state of Texas, and I made 3,000 appointments of women, Hispanics, blacks gays, and the disabled."

In this one-woman show (with off-stage comments by Julie White as the voice of Richards' assistant, Nancy Kohler), Richards is ostensibly delivering a commencement address at the end of a long career in politics. Taylor enters a stage, approaches a wooden podium and launches in to a speech that melds her life experiences with imparting wisdom for the graduating class.

Taylor gets outside herself and absolutely inhabits the character of Richards, from her slightly stooped walk to her honeyed drawl to her foul-mouthed affability. From her lips come humorous adages like "I'm all in, money, marbles and chalk," and a gentle Texas drawl as she says words like "dawr-ling."

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"I bet some of you remember me just from my hair," she says, and truly, this classic, white, Q-tip bouffant is perfectly executed; wig designer Paul Huntley gets big kudos for this flawless coiffure.

But Taylor is more than just gimmicks. In her stage notes, she admits to being "compelled to write this play" by her growing admiration for all of Richards' accomplishments. She added that she relied on "years of overlapping stories told to me in significant detail" to flesh out the office scenes.

Taylor has done Richards a great service here, as the play covers the governor's childhood with a disapproving mother and a praising father who instilled in her great confidence. She tackles Richards' failed marriage and her struggle with alcoholism, via "a hundred thousand vodka martinis."

She even brings realism to Richards' fight for governor. "If I was ambitious, it was because I knew that life is not fair, but government should be," she telling says.

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Best of all, Taylor avoids turning Richards into an untouchable icon. Midway through the two-hour production, the scenery changes, and we see Richards in the governor's office, executing the everyday duties in her charge.

Among these are contemplating a stay of execution for a severely abused youth charged with raping a nun, signing piles and piles of legislation, negotiating deals with other lawmakers and taking repeat calls from Bill Clinton, whom she calls "kid." And speaking of kids, a good deal of the action involves her calling her own four children to plan a weekend fishing trip. Seeing her speak sharply to her son about easing off his younger brother during "charades" brings her within the reach of all, making her an everywoman.

Richards was a great leader during a time when Texas desperately needed one. Her gains for the state are inarguable. Taylor may be a self-professed Yankee, but her homage to Richards is both inspired, and deeply inspiring.



"Ann" runs through June 9 at the Vivian Beaumont Theater, 150 W. 65th Street in Lincoln Center. For info or tickets, call 212-238-6200 or visit <http://www.theannrichardsplay.com/>

Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she writes about local restaurants in her food blog, <http://brooklyniscookin.blogspot.com/>

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by Chyna Girl and Danny Ferro, with DJ Daisy D. EDGE has the photos.



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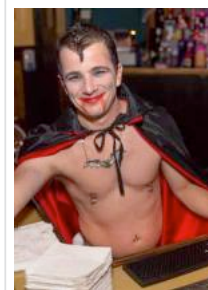
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