

Reviews of *Gee's Bend*  
By Elyzabeth Gregory Wilder

Commissioned and developed by the Alabama Shakespeare Festival as part of its Southern Writers' Project, Wilder's enthusiastically received world premiere is a glorious piece of theatrical handiwork that uses the civil rights movement as thread for stitching together the rich emotional material of a close-knit family of quilters. With echoes of Alice Walker's "The Color Purple" and Lynn Nottage's "Intimate Apparel," "Gee's Bend" has the rare distinction of being a lovely work of art and a bona fide crowd-pleaser... Like the quilts, 100 percent pure.

- Atlanta Journal-Constitution/Wendall Brock

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Look up quilting and you're likely to find a reference to Gee's Bend, Ala. The isolated peninsula on the Alabama River is home to a unique community of former African-American slaves who stitch stunning quilt patterns that serve as vibrant metaphors for their moving story.. Recipient of the American Theater Critics Assn.'s Osborn Award for emerging playwright, presented last month at the Humana Festival in Louisville, Ky., Wilder weaves an equally impressive tapestry, capturing the history and daily life of these inspirational souls while threading the local melodious dialect, spiritual conviction and artistic flare through the fabric of one family's story. Wilder's colorful language and characters, as well as her quintessential distillation of the material make for a stirring evening.

Variety/Bob Bows

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Gee's Bend is a lovefest -- between the characters in the play and the land they live on, between the actors and the characters they're portraying, between the play and the audience...But seeing Wilder's play sheds a beautiful light on those quilts: She has managed to show the women's dedication to their land and to their God during a turbulent time that changed the relationships between African-Americans and whites and between women and men. She also has created full-bodied, endearing characters, who grew out of the actual people she met in Gee's Bend...Wilder's drama is a pleasure.

- Orlando Sentinel/Elizabeth Maupin

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Elyzabeth Gregory Wilder's fascinating, interstitial story takes us to a cranny of land that time forgot: 10,000 acres isolated by a three-sided bend in the Alabama River, where the all-black populace remained largely isolated from the outside world for 190 years. Through Wilder's earnest writing "Gee's Bend," at its best, opens for us a historically accurate and little-known window into Martin Luther King's ability to call even the most remote Alabama heart to action...Like the Gee's Bend quilts, there is great artfulness within this story's many patchwork parts. It's ultimately a moving tale of female

empowerment and actualization. It has an enormous heart that wraps around its audiences' hearts like a river — on all four sides.

Denver Post/John Moore

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There is so much beauty in *Gee's Bend*. A setting that evokes thick Southern summer nights, with the heady call of crickets and a river slicing through the quilted wood floor like a scar. The elegant, spare beginnings of Elyzabeth Gregory Wilder's script, which moves like skipped stones through the lives of a *Gee's Bend*, Ala. family from 1939 to 2000. And most of all, the beautiful, human performances given by the three women and one male who take us into the lives Wilder based on the real women of *Gee's Bend*.

Rocky Mountain News/Lisa Bornstein

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Inspired by the history and spirit of *Gee's Bend*, playwright Elyzabeth Gregory Wilder has written an immensely entertaining and often stirring drama called *Gee's Bend*, kind of a small-scale *The Color Purple*, now receiving its Midwest premiere in a superior production at the Northlight Theatre. Wilder has miniaturized the story of *Gee's Bend*, concentrating on a handful of characters over a period from the late 1930's to the start of the new millennium. The play runs an uninterrupted 90 minutes. Its many scenes are connected by bursts of gospel singing that reinforce the blackness of the story and the unifying force of faith to sustain the women against the buffeting forces of poverty and racial oppression. In spite of the brevity of the play and the small number of characters, there is an epic sweep to *Gee's Bend*. The production is without blemish. Chuck Smith directs with insight and sensitivity, keeping the pace brisk and deftly balancing the play's rich vein of humor and its drama. In particular, Smith keeps the characters human and not just stereotype examples of the triumph of the human spirit.

ILLINOIS WIRE /Dan Zeff

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Many of my readers are aware of the fine quality theater that is presented on a regular basis at The Northlight in Skokie. For those of you who have not made the trip, I strongly suggest you do so as their current production, "*Gees Bend* ( a Gospel Music Play) is a marvelous piece that tells a wonderful story spanning more than 60 years in the life of Sadie Pettway and women of *Gees Bend*, Alabama. Based on true events, this is a heartwarming 90 minute production directed by Chuck Smith with a tremendous amount of feeling and each character in this script written by Elyzabeth Gregory Wilder who was inspired by what she learned about these women. The story is not about the quilts, but rather, the fabric of the characters- these women and how each scrap rag and piece of thread was part of their being woven together to keep them as unit. It is a story that will open your eyes to a little different side of the African American existence. The telling of this story is real and the actors that have been cast are perfection. Ms.

Wilder's words ring very true as we witness the changing times for African Americans and women during these years. - What a wonderful story!

TheatreInChicago.com/Mark Bresloff

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In the best tradition of August Wilson, playwright Elyzabeth Gregory Wilder has given us a glimpse into a part of the American experience that few of us knew about. Northlight Theatre's Midwest Premier of Gee's Bend is a heartwarming experience deftly directed by Chuck Smith. (Wilder) has captured the spirit of the women in a most compelling and tightly written 90 minute epic drama. Gee's Bend is a refreshing resilient glimpse into the heart of a strong people...Gee's Bend is more than a place, it is a way of life. The quilts give testimony to the art and craft of the folks of Gee's Bend. Theses stories sure need to be told. Highly Recommended

ChicagoCritic.com /Tom Williams

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It's a wonderful little play, full of humor and history, with a couple of performances that won't soon be forgotten... it covers a lot of ground without being preachy or heavy-handed. It's a beautiful production, and one that should be seen.

- Birmingham News/Alec Harvey

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The players have found rhythms of movement and speech that mix naturalism with ritual and gospel songs that enhance and punctuate Wilder's perceptively human script... Wilder deftly combines the ingredients of humor and pathos, realism and idealism, ordinary and eccentric...This is a remarkable play.

- Montgomery Advertiser/ Michael P. Howley