

The Old Settler

PHOTO BY HENRY EDWARDS JR.



Roc Living and
Detria Ward in
"The Old Settler."

The Old Settler

UNCSA's
Catawba Arena
Theatre

Fri, Aug. 7	3 p.m.
Fri, Aug. 7	8 p.m.
Sat. Aug. 8	3 p.m.
Sat. Aug. 8	8 p.m.

\$41

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Detria Ward and Bebe Wilson (seated) as sisters
Bess Borny and Quilly McGrath.

Houston's The Ensemble Theatre is bringing John Henry Redwood's comedy "The Old Settler" to this year's festival, and word is the Eileen J. Morris-directed production is a must see.

Set in Harlem in the Spring of 1943, "Settler" is the tale of Elizabeth "Bess" Borny, a 55-year-old spinster (or an Old Settler, as unmarried women of a certain age were once known) who rents a room to a handsome young Southern gentleman, Husband Witherspoon. The charming Husband sweet talks Elizabeth, to her delight. Her sister, Quilly McGrath, though, doesn't approve of this type of "carrying on." Quilly, two years Bess' junior, also lives in the apartment and constantly reminds her sister that Husband is young enough to be her son.

Husband traveled North to find his girlfriend, Lou Bessie Preston, who escaped to New York from South Carolina to transform herself into a worldly social butterfly, but he soon finds himself falling for Bess, a development that creates tension between the sisters and exposes an old wound they must finally address.

Roc Living plays Husband; Detria Ward is Bess; Samantha West plays Lou Bessie Preston. The part of Quilly McGrath is played by Bebe Wilson.

"The Old Settler" made its stage debut in 1995. The following year, it was selected by the Russian Theatre Union to be performed in Sheleykovo, Russia and Moscow with both an American and Russian cast. In 2001, sisters Phylicia Rashad and Debbie Allen, who are Houston natives, produced, directed and appeared in a television version on PBS. The Ensemble Theatre staged the play last year. It was well-received by audiences and critics.

The *Houston Chronicle's* Everett Evans gushed, "In The Ensemble Theatre's engaging production, John Henry Redwood's sure-footed comedy/drama does so many essential small things so well that it could easily outshine many a big-name work with inflated reputation."

Broadway World's David Clarke had this to say: "Direction by Eileen J. Morris guarantees that her cast creates believable characters ... she excels in having her cast bring out the tender moments, playing on the hearts of the audiences."

Morris is also an actress and educator. She worked closely with The Ensemble Theatre's founder, the late George W. Hawkins. As The Ensemble Theatre's artistic director, she has produced more than 78 productions, including four world premieres and 57 regional premieres.

Behind-the-scene players include scenic designer Janelle Flanagan, costume designer Macy Perrone and lighting designer Eric Marsh. ■



Eileen J. Morris