

Los Angeles Times

August 4, 2011

Theater review: 'Rose Cottages' at Will Geer Theatricum Botanicum

The “Jersey Shore” comes to Topanga in the amiably shaggy comedy “Rose Cottages,” now at Theatricum Botanicum. Bill Bozzone’s slight but endearing story of misfits finding a family is a perfect vehicle for Botanicum grande dame Ellen Geer to trade her Shakespearean mantle for a pair of marabou-trimmed flip flops.



Somewhere near Orlando, the deadbeat motel owned by Rose (Earnestine Phillips) is about to be closed down by a health department suit (Maurice Shaw). Desperate, Rose hires teenage Lydell (Graco Hernandez) for her cleanup crew, just as a trio of Jersey loudmouths arrive: Vince (Aaron Hendry) and his new wife, Ginger (Brynn Ann Kerin), struggling to cope with Vince’s mother, Jesse (Geer), a recently widowed handful. When the couple sneaks out and leaves Jesse in the lurch, Rose can’t believe her bad luck — until the wily old coot reveals she has more resources (and libido) than anyone ever expected.

Bozzone has an ear for street talk (“It’s money, Vince. You treat it like it’s your testicles”) and his characters are eccentric without feeling arch. Phillips in particular grounds the show in a salty role that was originally written for a man. But despite Heidi Helen Davis’s assured direction, the play’s humor can sometimes lose its punch, due to line flubs and the diffuse vibe of the outdoor space. (You want to bottle up these antics in a tiny black box.) Still, it’s a hoot to see Geer hamming it up in togas, head wraps and bosomy bathing suits. Like Bozzone’s idea of family, “Rose Cottages” is imperfect, but its heart is true.

--Charlotte Stoudt

“Rose Cottages” The Will Geer Theatricum Botanicum, 1419 North Topanga Canyon Blvd., Topanga. See website for schedule. Ends Oct. 2. \$10-\$32. Contact: (310) 455-3723 or www.theatricum.com Running time: 2 hours.

Photo: Ellen Geer, left, Graco Hernandez, and Earnestine Phillips. Credit: Ian Flanders.