Theater Review

Jay O'Callahan's stories get under your skin at Touchstone

By Geoff Gehman
Of The Morning Call

Jay O'Callahan doesn't just model stories; he wears them until they fit like skin. This gift makes the neighborly plays he's performing at Touchstone Theatre not only comfortable, but comforting.

The first tale, "Pouring the Sun," takes place in 1954 during a 65th birthday party for Ludwika Waldony, the remarkable ruler of a Bethlehem Steel family. Her gardening and cooking, iron will and steel faith, help her loved ones through good times (husband Fritz plays Chopin; son Alex receives a college scholarship) and bad times (Fritz loses three fingers in an accident at the Steel; Alex is killed by a beverage truck driven too fast on a bet).

O'Callahan brings Ludwika to vivid life. Her joy radiates, her pain penetrates, her humor lingers ("I talk so long, my grandchildren grew two inches"). He enlivens other characters with authority: a puppeteer's face, a painter's hands and a musician's voice (the trollish toll collector is a winner). The finale, when Ludwika ends a long depression by bravely carrying potato soup to picketers during the 1941 strike, is so beautifully modulated and paced, it could be a movie.

Photo by Alexandra Swan