WPCC's Performing Arts Program

presents

Thursday, Friday & Saturday May 2-4

7:00 PM

WPCC'S Phifer Studio

$5.00

Sunday, May 5

2:00 PM

(Adult themes)

"Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe"

Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe

a novel by
Fannie Flagg

adapted and directed by
Cheryl Oxford

I may be sitting here at the Rose Terrace Nursing Home, but in my mind I'm over at the Whistle Stop Cafe having a plate of fried green tomatoes.

--Mrs. Cleo (Ninny) Threadgoode

The Cast:

Narrator	Dawn McCombs
Ninny Threadgoode	Mandy Mikeal
Evelyn Couch	Patti Brown
Ruth Jamison	Brandi Carter
Idgie Threadgoode	Susan Cato
Eva Bates	Jada Lawing
Clerk/Bartender/Defense Attorney	Colin White
Old Bum/Smokey Lonesome	Mark Woodard
Ruth's Mother	Fran Coleman
Frank Bennett/Prosecutor	Jonathan Wallin
Mrs. Puckett	Michelle Elliott
Buddy/Julian Threadgoode	Josh Propst
Momma Threadgoode	Melissa Elledge
Poppa Threadgoode	Rus Cato
Grady Kilgore/Ed Couch/Barber/Doctor	Ryan Young
Sipsey	Erica Schwarting
Big George	Edward Max
Curtis Smoote/Judge	Rik Covalinski
Rev. Herbert Scroggins	Scott Woodard
Stump Threadgoode	Thomas McCombs
Mrs. Jonnie Hartman	Amanda Drum

The Crew:

Music	Louise White
Lights	Byna Forbes and Shannon Propst
Sound	Tonya Carswell
Costumes	Byna Forbes and the Cast
Set	Paul Wardzinski and the Cast
Logo	Scott Woodard

Special Thanks:

The Oxfords, The News Herald, Wendy Cato and Make Mine Country

Strong Cast Brings

Fried Green Tomatoes

to the Stage

--a preview by Beth Buckner--

The WPCC Performing Arts Program's production of Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe opens tonight with laughter and tears aplenty, as a strong cast brings this novel onto the stage of the College's Phifer Studio.

Good directing, ensemble acting, technical teamwork, and a beautiful musical score make this production a must-see for everyone who supports local community theatre.

Cheryl Oxford, who adapted the script and directs the production, poses her company no small challenge in staging Fannie Flagg's southern novel set during the 1930's and 1980's in both Whistle Stop, Alabama, and Valdosta, Georgia. But the company meets this challenge with a theatrically suggestive style which has become the College troupe's trademark.

Fried Green Tomatoes is arguably WPCC's most dynamic work to date.

Narrative summary and description is handled capably by Dawn McCombs, the storyteller. The novel's prose is richly evocative, and the veteran McCombs handles the production's many moods and transitions with skill and good timing.

Mandy Mikeal brings Mrs. Ninny Threadgoode vividly to life. Her portrayal of aged strength and dignity, with just the right twist of comic relief, never falters.

Patti Brown plays the part of Evelyn Couch with great zest and aplomb. Her character's poor self-image is enhanced by listening to Mrs. Threadgoode's stories of Idgie and Ruth.

Susan Cato has Idgie Threadgoode down to a T. By turns amusing, angry, and anguished, Cato delivers a finely nuanced performance of a complex character. Her energy animates every scene in which she appears.

Brandi Carter exudes warmth and charm as Ruth Jamison. Her character's quiet courage in the face of difficult choices gives this production much of its human appeal.

The love between Idgie and Ruth is handled delicately, yet honestly, by Cato and Carter. The charismatic chemistry of their stage partnership is one of the show's virtues.

Jada Lawing is very strong in the role of Eva Bates, proprietress of the Wagon Wheel Club.

Erika Schwarting brings a quiet strength to her portrayal of Sipsey.

Also good in their roles are Melissa Elledge as Momma Threadgoode, Fran Coleman as Ruth's Mother, Michelle Elliott as Mrs. Puckett, and Amanda Drum as Mrs. Jonnie Hartman.

The men in the company bring an impressive depth of talent and experience to this production.

The male leads include the talented Jon Wallin, who plays Frank Bennett with an insidious menace. Wallin also shines as the prosecutor in the courtroom scene.

Ryan Young superbly creates several characters, ranging from Ed, Evelyn's husband, to Grady Kilgore, the sheriff of Whistle Stop.

Also excellent in multiple roles are Colin White and Rik Covalinski, founding partners of The Blue Ridge Repertory Theatre.

Brothers Mark Woodard, as Smokey Lonesome, and Scott Woodard, as the Reverend Herbert Scroggins, are always a pleasure to watch on any stage.

Josh Propst does double duty, playing the brothers Buddy and Julian Threadgoode with competence.

Thomas McCombs is charming as Stump, Ruth and Idgie's son. At age nine, he is already a theatre veteran.

Edward Max is delightful as Big George. His performance aptly illustrates the old theatre adage that there are no small roles.

Rus Cato takes on the role of Poppa Threadgoode with a paternal good humor.

Shannon Propst and Byna Forbes competently control the production's many, many light cues. Forbes also assists with the costumes. Tonya Carswell runs the show's recorded music and sound effects.

Louise White's piano score is nothing less than beautiful. The music adds an emotional dimension that enhances the play's dramatic impact.

If you loved the movie, go to see this show. If you couldn't put down the book, go to see this show. If you enjoy well-crafted theatre, go to see this show.

Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe will be presented tonight, Friday, and Saturday at 7:00 p.m. and Sunday at 2:00 p.m. in the College's Phifer Studio. Admission is $5.

Fried Green Tomatoes is recommended for mature audiences.

For more information, contact Dr. Cheryl Oxford, Coordinator of Performing Arts, at 438-6093.

(Beth Buckner teaches theatre at South Caldwell High School.)

News Herald March 21, 1996

Oxford adapts 'Fried Green Tomatoes' for upcoming WPCC production

This spring, the WPCC Performing Arts Program will present a chamber theatre production of "Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe," by Fannie Flagg.

Cheryl Oxford has adapted the novel for the stage.

"The novel is much richer in texture and detail than the movie, and our production tries to capture more of Flagg's narrative nuances," Oxford said.

"Like William Faulkner's imaginary Yoknapatawpha County, Flagg creates an entire world peopled by Southerners of all ages, both black and white. Putting this world on stage in the Phifer Studio will present the Performing Arts Program with many challenges."

The major difference between the novel and the movie is the novel's narrative perspective, which offers insights into what the characters are thinking and feeling. The Performing Arts Program's production maintains this narrative / storytelling perspective. The narrator will be played by veteran actress Dawn McCombs.

"Dawn's character is an on-stage bridge between events in the past and in the present," Oxford explained.

"We're thinking of her character as a young Mrs. Ninny Threadgoode, who is now an eighty-six year old woman in a nursing home. But Dawn's character is like Ninny's memory or spirit, which vividly recalls events from the Depression era as if they had just happened yesterday."

"Fried Green Tomatoes" will be presented Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, May 2-4, at 7 p.m. and Sunday, May 5, at 2 p.m. in the Phifer Studio.

For more information, contact Cheryl Oxford at 438-6093.

'Fried Green Tomatoes' to feature Patti Brown

Patti Brown, a part-time WPCC student and mother of two, will play the role of Evelyn Couch in the Western Piedmont Community College Performing Arts Program's spring production of "Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe."

A relative new-comer to community theatre, Brown has appeared in the Old Colony Players' productions of "Annie" (with her daughter, Anna) and in "Jake's Women." She is currently in rehearsals for "Lil' Abner."

At WPCC, Brown performed in "Appalachian Patchwork" for a dinner theatre at the Grove Park Inn in Asheville.

About "Fried Green Tomatoes," Brown said, "The story is about 86-year-old Ninny Threadgoode, who is such a strong, loving person — and she gives those qualities to Evelyn Couch. Ninny's story helps Evelyn find peace.

About the role of Evelyn Couch, Brown said, "I really can identify with how she's feeling. She is pulled in different directions between her family life and herself. She has to balance a lot of responsibilities."

The story of Whistle Stop comes to have a profound effect on Evelyn, as Brown noted: "Idgie is a role model to Evelyn because Idgie does not allow other people to rule her life. Evelyn admires that, because she's trying to break out of doing things for everyone else. She's trying to break out of the "housewife" stereotype that has really trapped her."

Patti Brown

About one of the novel's many messages, Brown added: "In our society today, elderly people are treated as children. But I feel that the elderly are a treasure chest full of things if we'll only ask them.

"I'm proud to be a part of the whole ensemble," Brown concluded. "Having the opportunity to return to college and take part in theatre is a dream-come-true for me."

"Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe" will be presented Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, May 2 - 4, at 7 p.m. and Sunday, May 5, at 2 p.m. in the College's Phifer Studio. The production contains adult themes and is recommended for mature audiences.

For more information, contact Dr. Cheryl Oxford, Coordinator of Performing Arts, at 438-6093.

Cato plays Idgie in 'Fried Green Tomatoes'

Susan Cato of Morganton will play the role of Idgie Threadgoode in the upcoming WPCC Performing Arts Program's production of "Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe."

Cato began acting at 6 with the Ashe County Little Theatre, where she performed in "Fiddler on the Roof," "Annie," "The Sound of Music," "A Christmas Carol," "The King and I," and "Brighton Beach Memoirs."

In high school, Cato was a member of the N.C. 4-H Performing Arts Troupe, appearing in "Character Study" and "Masque/Montage," original works featuring drama and music.

Selected to attend Governor's School-West in 1992, Cato acted in "Under Milk Wood" and "Orpheus Descending."

A 1994 graduate of Freedom High School, Cato was a member of the Freedom Playmakers. She performed in "The Odd Couple," "Our Miss Brooks," and sang the role of Maria in "West Side Story."

At WPCC, Cato has been a member of the company for "Step on a Crack" and "Appalachian Patchwork." She was a finalist in Amateur Night at WPCC.

With the Old Colony Players in Valdese, Cato has recently been seen in "Jake's Women" and "You Can't Take It With You."

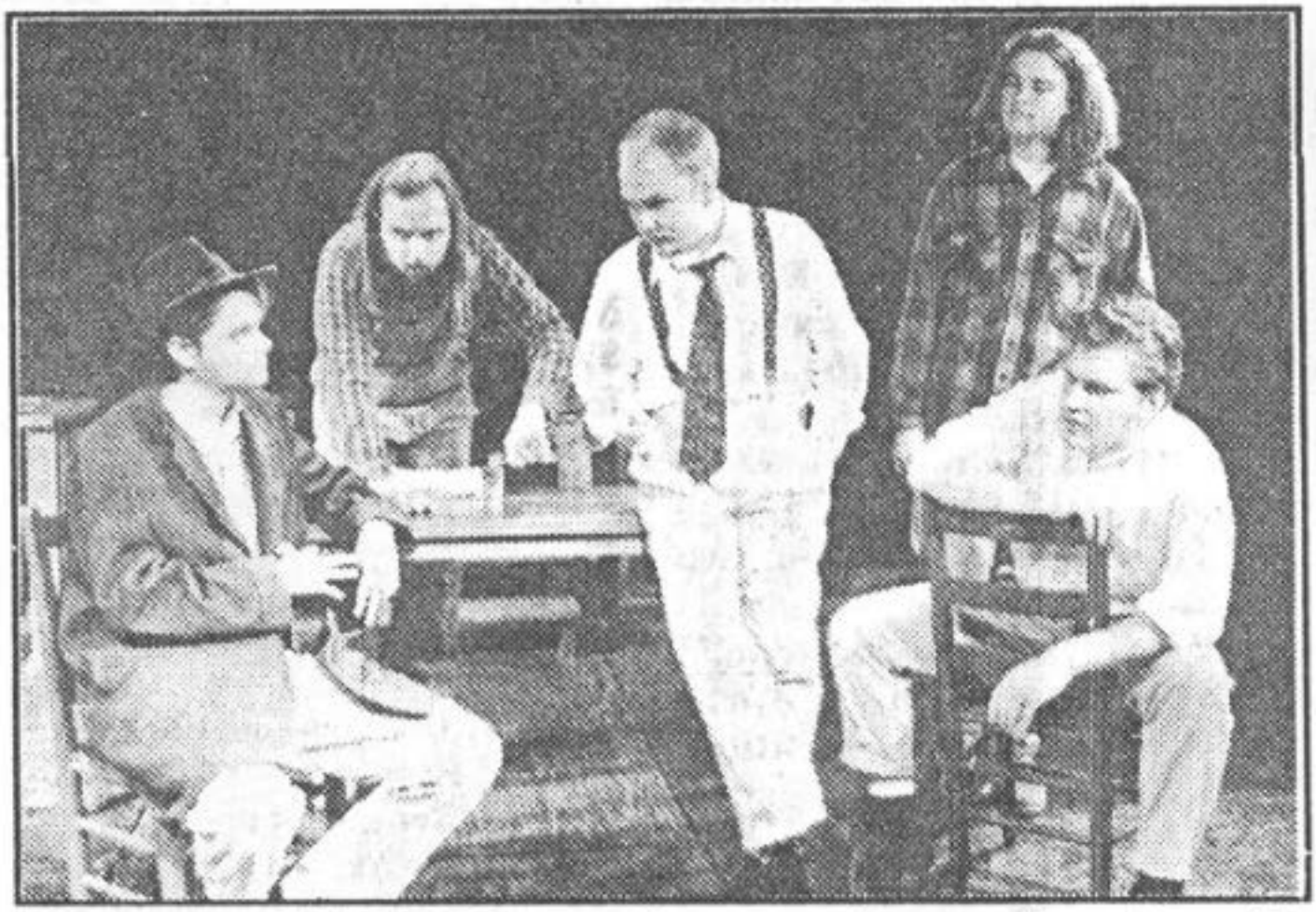
About the role of Idgie Threadgoode, Cato said: "It's hard to imagine a character with any more dignity or beauty. She's as strong as a mountain yet as gentle as a spring breeze. I think the important factor in Idgie's character is the passion she has for life and for Ruth."

Susan Cato will play the role of Idgie Threadgoode in WPCC's production of "Fried Green Tomatoes."

"Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe" will be presented Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, May 2 - 4, at 7 p.m. and Sunday, May 5, at 2 p.m. in the College's Phifer Studio. Admission is $5. Tickets may be purchased in advance from the WPCC Book Cellar or at the door.

"Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe" contains adult themes and is recommended for mature audiences.

For more information, contact Dr. Cheryl Oxford, Coordinator of Performing Arts, at 438-6093.



The men of "Fried Green Tomatoes" are shown above left. They are, from left to right, Mark Woodard, Colin White, Jonathan Wallin, Josh Propst and Ryan Young. Above right is Thomas McCombs who plays the part of Stump.

Talented men hold roles in 'Fried Green Tomatoes'

The WPCC Performing Arts production of "Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe" will feature a cadre of talented actors from the area.

Ryan Young plays the role of Grady Kilgore, the sheriff of Whistle Stop, Alabama.

Mark Woodard appears as Smokey Lonesome, the hobo.

Colin White plays the multiple roles of the clerk and the defense attorney.

Thomas McCombs takes the part of Stump, Ruth and Idgie's little boy who loses his arm in a train accident.

Other men in the cast include Josh Propst as brothers Buddy and Julian Threadgoode, Scott Woodard as the Reverend Herbert Scroggins, Rik Covalinski as Detective Curtis Smoote, Edward Max as Big George, Rus Cato as Poppa Threadgoode, and Jonathan Wallin as Frank Bennett.

"Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe" will be presented Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, May 2 - 4, at 7 p.m. and Sunday, May 5, at 2 p.m. in the Phifer Studio.

Admission is $5. Seating in the Phifer Studio is limited, and advance tickets are on sale at the WPCC Book Cellar (438-6005). Tickets will also be available at the door.

"Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe" contains adult themes and is recommended for mature audiences.

For more information, contact Dr. Cheryl Oxford, Coordinator of Performing Arts, at 438-6093.

News Herald April 25, 1996

You'll enjoy a trip to WPCC's Whistlestop Cafe

ELIZABETH BRUTON
Review

The Whistlestop Cafe opened briefly last weekend at Western Piedmont Community College, courtesy of the WPCC Performing Arts Program — and what a fine experience it was.

This was the world premiere of "Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistlestop Cafe," director Cheryl Oxford's original adaptation of the Fannie Flagg novel, true to the book rather than to the movie.

Oxford retains the mood of the novel, using a narrator to pick up Ninny Threadgoode's voice in the flashbacks.

Oxford also wisely chooses to concentrate on the Idgie/Ruth plot. She allows the framing tale of Evelyn and the elder Ninny to interrupt the flow of the main plot only enough to present the profound effect the elder Ninny's tale has on Evelyn and to show the parallel stories of friendship between such opposite women.

The adaptation has only a tiny plot glitch. The audience sees who kills Frank Bennett, but Ninny says she herself does not know. The only things we should see are Ninny's memories, since this is her story.

The narrator, who watches over scenes with a large black notebook containing her lines pressed open against her chest, could have been dispensed with. Ninny's own voice-over, as in some scenes in this play, would have been appropriate and less intrusive.

The most important point, though, is that this production was wonderful. Working with less room, equipment and budget than any other small theater in the area, WPCC nonetheless produced a superior cast. Some are theater arts majors, others from a drama English class and one or two guest artists from the community. Almost all are college age.

Several performances stand out.

As the lead character of Idgie, Susan Cato has finally emerged as a serious actor. She captures Idgie's complicated nuances: her confusion about her feelings and her longing for love and companionship; her joy and her innocence; her utter (and remarkably colorful) fluency when angry and her inability to express herself when hurt. Cato shows her incredible range in creating this role for stage.

Colin White in three roles — the clerk, the bartender and the defense attorney — is tremendously adept at capturing the character within the first one or two lines.

Erica Schwarting as Sipsey, the maid and Big George's mother, plays this difficult role delicately. Sipsey is strong, delicate, silent, with a wicked private sense of humor and a sense of humanity honed by watching the people she loves cope with pain. Schwarting makes Sipsey a presence.

Edward Max as Big George turns in a gem of a performance. Big George is a strong man who never compromises his integrity in spite of his subservient position to the white population of the deep South during the first third of this century. His virtue is his unswerving loyalty, especially to Idgie. Max, who has proven he's one of the finest actors in performances at Hickory Community Theatre and Green Room, creates a compelling, admirable character.

Louise White does a wonderful job on piano with the background music, a selection of old hymns and popular songs of the era. The piano is precisely the right instrument to set the mood. Byna Forbes and the cast worked together to create ideal period costumes. And Paul Wardzinski's minimal, modular set cleverly uses the small space available.

This production may be a hallmark for WPCC's Performing Arts Program.

Elizabeth Bruton is a member of the English faculty at Catawba Valley Community College and a seminarian at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte. She has a master's degree in English and has done doctoral work in literature with a specialty in drama. She is a folk artist and has had classical voice training.

The Charlotte Observer
"Catawba Valley Neighbors"
Wed., May 8, 1996

WESTERN PIEDMONT COMMUNITY COLLEGE