

Back in 1982 playwright Dan Needles, director Doug Beattie and actor Rod Beattie collaborated on a one-man play called LETTER FROM WINGFIELD FARM. It was so successful that it has spawned six sequels. WINGFIELD LOST & FOUND is the latest.

Walt Wingfield is a stockbroker who left the city to become a farmer in Persephone Township. The format remains unchanged. We first see Ed, a newspaper publisher, reading a letter from Walt. Next we meet Walt who tells of events in his life through letters to Ed. Each letter is about separate incidents loosely tied together by a theme – in this case Walt’s dry well in the midst of a drought. The familiar set remains the same – a half-open barn door, a fence, a dresser, a table and chair. That’s all that’s needed to indicate the multiple settings.

Somehow the playwright has managed to connect herding belted galloways via text messaging, a retired dowser who’s lost his gift, bottled water, the environment, three peculiar “water witches” and his trumpet-playing neighbor Don’s decision to give up farming and join a band of retired dairy farmers in Vancouver into a cohesive whole. Mr. Needles perfectly walks the fine line between sentiment and sentimentality, while also providing plenty of humor.

Rod Beattie is a master of delineating characters with minimal changes of expression and voice. In the course of the play we meet his wife, daughter, dog Spike, neighbor Don, the above-mentioned dowser and water witches and my favorite, his snortingly irreverent brother-in-law Freddie. All these characters seem to come alive on the stage. The use of original music, written and played by Stephen Woodjetts, adds a great deal to one of the very human and touching plot lines.

This is gentle human comedy, in the manner of Will Rogers, Garrison Keillor and Stuart McLean. If you’ve not yet made the acquaintance of Walt Wingfield, this production provides a good opportunity. If you have, it’s like welcoming an old friend. I was smiling all the way through.

On a scale of one to five, the 1000 Islands Playhouse production of WINGFIELD LOST & FOUND gets five fish. For North Country Public Radio I’m Connie Meng.