

Written by Thom White

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When it matters most, the Playcrafters Barn Theatre gets *A Miracle Worker* right, and does emotional justice to author William Gibson's tale of Annie Sullivan (Cayte McClanathan) teaching the blind, deaf, and mute Helen Keller (Emma Terronez) how to communicate through sign language. The scenes shared by McClanathan and Terronez are powerful, and their chemistry palpable, in Annie's fight to force young Helen to learn, and Helen's stubborn efforts to resist. But in truth, Saturday's performance didn't really find its footing until McClanathan and Terronez first shared the stage about halfway through Act I.

When the central pair is absent, director Rae Mary's production lacks energy, with uneven pacing and slow, almost boring progression. On Saturday, the opening scene in which Leigh VanWinkle's Kate and Bill Peiffer's Captain Keller stood over their infant Helen's cradle and first realized their daughter could neither see nor hear was a bit clunky, as the actors seemed uncertain about how they were supposed to emotionally maneuver their way through the scene. It wasn't until McClanathan's fiery Annie was introduced in the third scene that the performance got the spark it much needed. As the formerly blind woman assigned to help calm Helen and give her a "voice," the captivating McClanathan possesses the necessary stubbornness and spirit of this independent and proud character. Still, it took a few more scenes for Mary's staging of this classic piece of theatre to find its rhythm, which happened when Annie arrived at the Keller home and first met her young pupil. At that point, the battle of wills that ensued, following their introduction, drove Playcrafters' production.

To Helen, Back Again: "The Miracle Worker," at the Playcrafters Barn Theatre through November 17

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[Playcrafters.com](http://www.playcrafters.com)