

BackStage West

CRITIC'S PICK

A HOLE IN THE DARK

April 27, 2006

at 2nd Stage Theatre

When it comes to playing the race card, the Rosehues are divided on the rules of the game. Miranda (a wonderfully funny Jodi Carlisle) is all for going overboard to help their black neighbors, even to the point of cooking an exotic lunch from scratch, although she hasn't cooked a meal since the Thai Take-Out opened 12 years earlier. The terminally grouchy Desmond (Michael Adler), deprived of his morning paper, which never seems to get delivered, thinks they shouldn't do a damn thing for the neighbors, because he taught that neighbor everything he knew, and now Desmond is facing a bidding war and a lawsuit with his uppity former apprentice. Daughter Francine (Robyn Cohen) is heading into revolutionary territory as an anorexic lesbian activist with a piercing fetish. There's a brilliant bit in which she fights for power over her gorgeous hair; she then cuts it all off because it has begun to rule her stripped-down life. Younger sister Beatrix (Corryn Cummins), of the saintly name, is only happy when she's spying on neighbor Baby, a big, beautiful black dude, through his sheer bedroom blinds. Meanwhile, Bartholomew (Josh D. Green), the son who believes suffering is a virtue devoutly to be wished, returns from the South—the deep, deep South—where he has acquired a dashing tan that makes him look almost black, along with some disturbing revelations that may be buried under the family tree.

The hilarious setup has a distinctly dark side as Beatrix's time- and gender-bending journey back to the family plantation digs up a randy slave owner (Carlisle), his favorite slave (Leonard Roberts), a barren and jealous wife (Cohen), a vicious slave master (Adler), and an eye-opening scenario that takes no prisoners as it tackles black-white relations, identity politics, entitlement, socio-racial guilt, resentment, superiority, and the behavior of people who don't know where they fit in the mixed-up universe. The playing out of the revelations and the conclusions they occasion are silly, outlandish, shocking, outrageously funny even without a laugh track, and sometimes, unfortunately, very true to life.

Director Darin Anthony uses every trick in the Director's Book of Farce/Comedy—brisk pacing, clever staging, Roy Rede's excellent set design, Jaymi Lee Smith's clever lighting, Sherry Linnell's fun costumes, Dean Harada's swell sound design, and of course Hilly Hicks Jr.'s marvelous knee-slapper of a play—to make everything come together in a harmonious mix of talent, absurdity, and home truths.

Presented by the Blank Theatre Company at 2nd Stage Theatre, 6500 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood. Thu.-Fri. 8 p.m., Sat. 7:30 p.m., Sun. 2 p.m. Apr. 22-May 28. (323) 661-9827. theblank.com.

Reviewed by Madeleine Shaner