

VARIETY

## A Hole in the Dark

By TERRY MORGAN

A Blank Theater Company presentation of a play in two acts by Hilly Hicks Jr. - Directed by Darin Anthony.

**Hilly Hicks Jr.'s "A Hole in the Dark" doesn't lack ambition. His exploration of white guilt concerning African-Americans touches on business conflicts, the liberal identification of black culture as inherently more real than suburban white existence, the fetishization of black male sexuality and inner racism masked by outer kindness. In this West Coast premiere by the Blank Theater Company, director Darin Anthony and a sensaysh cast deliver an acidly witty production. If the tone shifts from serious drama to broad humor don't quite work, the show is still a hilarious treat.**

Desmond Rosehue (Michael Adler) has just successfully sued the city for hiring his black neighbor instead of him to construct a new bridge, but his wife Miranda (Jodi Carlisle) sees no reason the neighbors wouldn't want to accept her invitation to dinner. Cheerful and pixilated daughter Beatrix (Corryn Cummins) is in lust with the neighbor's son, and their politically correct daughter Francine (Whitney Laux) intends to starve herself to protest against some nebulous oppression.

When guilty son Bartholomew begins to research his family's roots and finds out an ancestor was a slaveholder, however, their lives take an unexpected direction. Miranda goes through more changes than any other character, and local acting treasure Carlisle is equal to every challenge with her robust and rollicking perf. At first she tries to put a good face on a deteriorating situation ("How can they hate us? I made orange biscotti!"). Then she descends into alcoholic myopia; her second-act entrance and a moment in which she swings around coyly in her electric wheelchair are priceless. Carlisle's portrayals of Miranda and her male slaveholding ancestor lead to a moment of racist ugliness and ultimate acceptance that, while not necessarily believable, is nonetheless deeply moving. Laux, who resembles a younger Maria Bello, is terrifically funny as Francine. Her delivery of a very clever monologue about how hair is a tool of fascist repression is riotously on target. Laux also plays the slaveholder's wife in a skillful display of thespian range with a colder and more subdued perf, though not without humor, as she comments about a runaway slave: "Our property is stealing our property!"

Cummins is excellent as the mostly innocent Beatrix, and her increasingly lascivious descriptions of her black object of desire are expertly cut comedic gems. Leonard Roberts brings a great deal of grace and charm to his perf as the female slave Yippee (and also as Bartholomew in act two), although his vocal mannerisms make her seem a bit like a drag queen, which presumably wasn't the playwright's intention. Roy Rede's cozy Better Homes & Gardens domestic set, complete with mounted picture plates of snowmen and ducks, features walls ingeniously composed of see-through fabric; it becomes a plantation setting when needed and centers the show. Sherry Linnell's costumes, from Beatrix's girly outfit to an antebellum dress, are pitch-perfect.

Sets, Roy Rede; costumes, Sherry Linnell; lighting, Jaymi Lee Smith; sound, Dean Harada; production stage manager, Jennifer Klos. Opened April 22, 2006, reviewed April 28; runs through May 28. Running time: 2 HOURS.