



New York Theatre Wiresm

Theatre Dance Performance Art Music
Alternative and International Theatre

And the acting was so good!

by

Glenda Frank



L-R: Ronald Peet, Charlayne Woodard. Photo by Monique Carboni.

From March 5 to 31, 2019

**The Pershing Square Signature Center
480 West 42nd Street.**

Directed by Danya Taylor

Tickets: \$40-\$125 www.signaturetheatre.org

Reviewed by Glenda Frank.

In the early scenes of “Daddy,” a new play by Jeremy O. Harris (“Slave Play”), Franklin is preparing for an opening of a one-man show that features small cloth dolls of black children. By the end of the play, Franklin’s new show features giant dolls that resemble Andre, his white lover, his mother, and himself. The cloth sculptures are a metaphor.

Harris is a talented playwright who has no fear of taking wild, creative spins. It is refreshing. But he is also at the beginning of his career so while “Daddy” is almost 3 hours long, the coming of age theme is not clear until the last hour. Meanwhile we are treated to some satirical portraits of Franklin’s friends, a hot love story, a disapproving church-going mom who is full of surprises, a gospel choir, and a swimming pool that gets a work-out. Advice: You may not want to sit in the first three rows.

At the beginning the play seems to be about an aging art collector who is white and a young, handsome black artist. We get to see both of them in the all-together – as they might be in a private Bel Aire pool deck. Andre (Alan Cumming in another perfect performance), the dealer, is clearly besmitten. When Franklin, fueled by Andre’s

attention and too much wine, launches into a critique of Andre's artwork, the dealer is enchanted. He wants to see the world through Franklin's eyes and promises to re-arrange his residential collection. By the second or three acts, the new paintings are in place.

Andre's every move emboldens Franklin. He offers the young man his full contact list, funding, a new workshop, and parties where important people meet and greet. The predator as fairy godfather.

But the sex becomes strange. Franklin calls Andre "Daddy," and Andre likes it. It becomes their role play. When Zora, Franklin's mom, arrives, we learn that Franklin never got to know his father, and the hunger remains. The man who seemed a predator and fairy godfather begins to see like Franklin's psychological passage to manhood.

Andre is gracious and, despite Franklin's reluctance, insists on hosting Zora's stay because she is his lover's mother. But Zora's opposition to Andre – or, as she calls him, Methuselah only grows and becomes the catalyst for Andre's marriage proposal, an action that seemed improbable based on their earlier conversation. The proposal itself is a catalyst. Meanwhile the three members of the gospel choir keep changing their costumes and singing a lot.



L-R: Kahyun Kim and Tommy Dorfman. Photo by Monique Carboni.

The acting was so good! Franklin's mom is a perfect fit for Charlayne Woodard's ("Ain't Misbehavin'") gifts and then some. Ronald Peet as Franklin was charismatic and convincing although the hint of psychological damage – banging his head—was hard to configure into the whole. (Was that in the script or director Danya Taymor's choice?) Actor Kahyun Kim turned Bellamy's mindless superficiality into delicious humor and managed, even while cajoling goodies, to be interesting. A marvelously alive supporting performance!

I wasn't crazy about the pool, particularly when the characters waded around in it fully clothed for no clear reasons. There is nothing like an odd directorial choice to shift the audience out of the play. Lots of frontal nudity, which was at times a little too in your face.

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