

Theater Review: Great Day In A Morning

Reviewer: Gordon Parks

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Recently, I had the pleasure of seeing Percy Thomas's new play, *Great Day In A Morning*, performed beautifully by the Heralds of Hope Theatre, at the Randolph Road Theater in Silver Spring, Maryland. The Theater was transformed into a 1800s slave quarters environment.

The creative set, designed by Prince NORA, captured a realistic view of where slaves lived. The forest was made up of logs and actual brush from Montgomery County's wooded areas.

Inside the realistic Slave Quarters and woods, an ensemble of strong actors performed. In the beginning of the play the slaves learn that the Massa Eziel's death is imminent. Massa Eziel has fathered two slave children, Monroe (Aubrey Arnold) and Zelma (Armenia Black). The Massa has requested that his only son Monroe come to see him on his deathbed, which he refuses to do. The impending death of the Massa heightens the fears of the slaves in the Quarters of what is going to happen to them. Cast who played slaves consist of: Apollo (Nicholas Friend) a slave who worked on the plantation as a slave driver, with ambitions to become the Overseer when the Massa dies. Moses (Charles Daye) a bitter, old slave breeder. Moses hated the Massa for all the women he had been made to father children with. Hercules (Percy Thomas) was a good friend to Monroe and was willing to follow Monroe in his plot to escape slavery. Cherry (Eunice Seagraves and Billie Taylor) Monroe's wives worked in the Big House and held an attachment to the Massa. Her major focus was protecting her husband and friends.

At the play's start, Monroe is told that his father wants to see him. Monroe is emphatic but he wants nothing to do with the Massa. Rumors run rampant as to who is going to be the new owner of the Plantation once the Massa dies. Several of the slaves encourage Monroe to go see the Massa and ask the Massa to make him the new Overseer, set him free and/or give him some money.

Each actor delivers a noteworthy performance, but standouts include Eunice Seagraves and Billie Taylor as Cherry, Charles Daye as Moses, and Nicholas Friend as Apollo. The emotional delivery of Charles Daye's, depiction of the contempt for his role as a breeder slave, is compelling. The voice of Armenia Black and Eunice Seagraves are beautiful and appropriately delivered in the context of the 1800 slave environment. Overall, this was a strong performance of slave voices from the Slave Quarters.

Producer Alice Thomas and Director Percy W. Thomas have put together an amazing show with great voices, smooth scene changes, effective set and lighting design, an 1800s cohesiveness that is impressive. All actors performed as an ensemble, and no one competed for the spotlight.

In addition, the lighting and sound design of Prince NORA and the costume design of Alice Thomas enhance the show. I can only describe the lighting as effective, with the carefully placed spotlights with color gels and gobos playing their own distinct parts in the show. The costumes reflected the differences between the apparel of the house slaves and the field slaves.

This production is a must see. This show should be run again in February for Black History. The production is more than just a play, it is filled with factual information regarding slavery in the 1800s. There are many performances of this kind that deal with slavery, however, I guarantee you won't find one quite like the Heralds of Hope Theater production. I saw the last performance of this, however, I am encouraging that this powerful work be considered for production in 2016 or sooner.

For more information call (410) 997-3997 or visit their website at www.heraldsfhopetheater.com