

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Honk If You Love Honky

Sylvie · Tuesday, June 14th, 2016

Yeah, I know. For reasons beyond my control, I waited much too long to see the Los Angeles premiere of *Honky* at Rogue Machine Theatre, but boy, talk about a proper satire for our times!

“Our times.” What are they? Pathetic caricatures of what they once were. They are not just about “change” any more, but change on steroids. Just as I was thinking that things could not get more twisted or bizarre, given the ascendancy of Donald Trump, here comes *Honky*, the most refreshing and spot-on spoof of racist confusion that we could aspire to.

And all of it over a pair of basketball shoes.

Stick with me here. When a black kid’s rainbow-colored Sky brand basketball shoes, designed by a black man, go missing after this kid is murdered, the white man who wrote the commercial for them is racked with guilt. It only gets worse when he consults a therapist for help — and she turns out to be black and a woman.

I won’t attempt to take you through the labyrinth of contorted language and events that follow these revelations, beyond saying that the play becomes a minefield of failed p.c. talk, exploded relationships, unlikely new pairings and other, often extremely funny, unintended consequences.

Davis Tallison, a white man (played by Bruno Oliver at this performance), is the marketer of these Sky shoes, while Thomas Hodge (Burl Moseley) is their designer. Peter Trammel (James Liebman) is the unfortunate soul who created the commercial that advertises them and that has grabbed the public by storm, wrecking Peter’s peace of mind. Peter is engaged to be married to Andie Chastain (a subtle Tasha Ames) whom he insistently describes as being “very white” to his black therapist, Emilia Hodge (Inger Tudor). In case you’re wondering, yes, Emilia and Thomas Hodge are related...



l-r, ChristianHenley, BurlMoseley and Matthew Hancock in *Honky* at Rogue Machine Theatre.

For most other playwrights this premise might morph into drama (or simply into disaster, thanks to its complications), but for Greg Kalleres it morphs into a stinging, singing comedy for “our times.” Visitors familiar with David Mamet’s *Glengarry Glen Ross* will find similarities in the sheer vitality, rudeness and damning humor of *Honky*, but Kalleres is a more humane writer than Mamet. Also a more skillful contortionist of hilarious dialogue that speaks volumes in mostly unfinished sentences and the uncompleted gesture. Beneath the obvious shooting down of the asinine extremes of political rectitude lies a much more forgiving approach to such personal and societal failings.

The people we meet in *Honky* are not the primary go-for-the-jugular crooks that we find in the Mamet play. They are unintentional bumbler, inadvertently caught up in their own calamities, so that we’re able to empathize with them as victims rather than frauds. What Kalleres succeeds in

doing is show us the enormity of the joke that is being played on *them*, as they struggle to live by the misguided rules society has imposed. It is much more of a tour de force than it might seem.



Inger Tudor and James Liebman in *Honky* at Rogue Machine Theatre.

A lot of credit goes to director Gregg T. Daniel for providing this careful balance of humanity in what might have been a harsher and a lot less amusing rebuke of the ills we live with.

Targeted simplicity also is in evidence in the plain setting by Stephanie Kerley Schwartz, enhanced by Nicholas E. Santiago's video and projections, Dan Weingarten's lighting and Jeff Gardner's clear sound design. Eliana Fuller provides brief, nicely choreographed segments of the two ghetto kids (Matthew Hancock and Christian Henley) who make key contributions to the unfolding story, appearing as well, even more briefly, as historical characters.

Naila Aladdin Sanders' thoughtful costume selection adds a good deal to limning the characters that we meet, especially the sweetly ditzy Andie of Tasha Ames. Andie may start out as a goofy child of privilege, but by play's end we see her as the generous, genuinely unbiased and loving person she is.

As for those fateful brightly colored basketball shoes at the center of the turmoil, I'd love to know where Sanders found them.

I want a pair.

Top image: Tasha Ames and Burl Moseley in Honky at Rogue Machine Theatre.

Photos by John Perrin Flynn

WHAT: *Honky*

WHERE: Rogue Machine Theatre, 1089 No. Oxford Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90029.

WHEN: Fridays & Saturdays, 8:30pm; Sundays, 3pm. Ends June 26.

HOW: Tickets \$34.99 available at www.roguemachinetheatre.com or 855.585.5185.

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