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Song & Stage

Play Review: Bay Street Theater's Golden "Raisin in the Sun"

The Literature Live! production is certified theatrical gold!

David Taylor November 20, 2019



Cassia Thompson and Chauncy Thomas in Bay Street Theater's 'A Raisin in the Sun,' Photo: Michael Heller



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In a previous interview with Dan's Papers, theater director Lydia Fort said her first impression of A Raisin in the Sun's troubled male lead, Walter Lee Younger, was of his insensitivity. Then, upon revisiting the material for Bay Street Theater's Literature Live! production, she began to see him in a new light—as someone struggling to prove his worth as a man to his family and to society at large.

Commanding the audience's attention with every stage entrance, Thomas's Walter is possibly the most over-the-top, transcendent performance to grace the Bay Street stage in 2019, pushing the character to new heights through exaggerated line delivery and an unbelievable array of dynamic facial expressions rivaling the great Jim Carrey.

Thomas isn't alone onstage, however. He's surrounded by an immensely talented cast bringing their all to their respective roles. Erin Margaret Pettigrew portrays Walter's steadfast wife Ruth with enviable strength and endless emotional range.

Cooki Winborn portrays the religious matriarch of the family Lena Younger, aka Mama, with insurmountable poise and dignity. Speaking in a calm, quiet voice, Winborn offers sagely wisdom and selfless sentiments, only resorting to corporal punishment in one surprising scene when her daughter Beneatha defies her belief in the existence of God.

Kaden Amari Anderson and Cooki Winborn in Bay Street Theater's 'A Raisin in the Sun,' Photo: Michael Heller

At only 10 years old, Kaden Amari Anderson has to have no trouble standing out among the older cast members, bringing forth loads of spunk and charm to the part of Travis Younger. Joe Pallister portrays the slimy, bigoted Karl Lindner flawlessly, delivering each duplicitous line with a cold, calculated tone.

With no intermission, the streamlined production comprises a perfect blend of intense drama and light-hearted moments, even packing a few laughs. Watching the Younger family bicker and argue over their late father's life insurance money is to sit on the battlefield of opposing dreams, unsure of who to side with.

At its core, Lorraine Hansberry's seminal 1959 play is about family, and Bay Street's production is must-see for families and individuals of any background. With inspired acting and brilliant directing, the show is certified theatrical gold!

A Raisin in the Sun runs through December 1 at Bay Street Theater (1 Bay Street, Sag Harbor). For tickets and more information, visit baystreet.org.

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