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Wedding Band (Antaeus Theatre) – Sweet Potatoes Cast



Alice Childress' 1965 script (not produced until 1972) is an amazing time-capsule of the evil effects of racial intolerance. Dealing, as it does, with a Charleston, South Carolina, interracial couple, Julia Augustine, black, and Herman-the-German, white, the connections with today are amazingly obvious.

While interracial marriage ("miscegenation") is no longer illegal in the United States of America, same-gender marriage is still illegal in South Carolina, proving that a spirit-of-hatred of "the other" will always be prevalent in pockets-of-ignorance. The other contemporary feel exists because Ms. Childress' play is set in 1918, during the horrific flu epidemic which killed upwards of 20,000,000 people around the world, and today's Ebola scare, in which as much misinformation, leading to hysteria, exists and is scarily used for political purposes, then as now.

But Miss Julia (**Karole Forman**) and Mr. Herman (**Leo Marks**) cannot legally wed anywhere in the country due to laws that were enforced nationally from 1691 to 1967, when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned them. They are in love, but no society – white or black – will accept their need for marriage in 1918. This concept was bizarre to us today, but so were the anti-Jewish/ Christian marriage laws in Nazi German, as well as our own anti-gay-marriage laws, finally crumbling.

Childress lays it all out for us to marvel at (in a negative way, of course), while we meet the women, girls, and man who live in the enclave of Miss Fanny Johnson (**Karen Bankhead**), the only "colored" woman allowed to own property in Charleston, as well as being "a credit to her race." Miss Julia has come to rent a back-room for the privacy she and Herman need. Her neighbors, Mattie (**Cheryl Francis Harrington**) and her daughter, Teeta (**Olivia Sparks**), Miss Lula Green (**Saundra McClain**) and her adopted grown son, Nelson (**Jason Turner**), are somewhat put off by Julia's attitudes, but understand (and still do not agree) when they meet her Herman.

The plot boils over when Herman contracts the deadly influenza, forcing his disapproving mother (the ever-great **Anne Gee Byrd**) and sister, Annabelle (**Karianne Flaathen**) to come to take him home, not daring to call for a doctor before the nightfall that would allow them to secretly remove him from the boarding house, which only aggravates his illness.

The power of the late Childress' play (she died in 1994) lies in the brutality (not violent, though) of the race-laws and the accompanying indignities bestowed on African-Americans (and white women, as well). A climactic scene with Herman's mother's diatribe against Julia, and Julia's repost's, are heaven-sent for drama and the two women shock us with the vitriol and their truths (however unpleasant).

Director **Gregg T. Daniel** showed us a firm hand on the "festivities," leaving his audience weak as well as enthralled. **François-Pierre Couture** has designed a remarkable set, all wood frame, clotheslines and porches, and **A. Jeffrey Schoenberg's** costumes are exquisitely period and well-lived-in.

It's a glorious production, much needed lest we forget how awful the past has been (as well as some of the present), with an exemplary cast – no weak links, per Antaeus' reputation. Foreman and Marks are

exemplary; Byrd and Flaathen do not quail before the characters' racism; Harrington, a personal favorite with her wide smile and fearful eyes; Brian Abraham as a disturbed peddler; McClain's powerful presence; Bankhead's painful attacks against Julia; and Turner's bottled-up anger as a soldier belittled by whites, are painful to watch, but the characters' lives are totally fulfilled. Do not hesitate to see either cast, but do not miss this play for any reason.

Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black and White runs through December 7th, 2014, at the Antaeus Theatre, 5112 Lankershim Blvd, North Hollywood, CA. Tickets: 818.506.1983 or at www.Antaeus.org.

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