

*Review: Timeline Theatre's "Kill Move Paradise"*

Timeline Theatre's "Kill Move Paradise" Raises the Dead and Indicts the Living

by Faith Hart

Timeline Theatre's latest production, "Kill Move Paradise" by James Ijames, offers a night at the theatre that isn't for the faint of heart. Wardell Julius Clark's direction of this expressionistic fever dream subverts audience expectations— what he offers is not just entertainment, but an indicting wake-up call for passive patrons.

The experience begins with Isa, powerfully played by Kai A. Ealy, probing the audience, "Come to see me? Yeah? What for? ... Think I can fix you?" Isa's questions raise a simple but profound provocation. By interrogating the role of the voyeuristic audience in the first breaths of the play, Ijames makes it clear that he is raising a magnifying glass to the very foundations of our society.

Isa and his counterparts, Daz, Grif, and Tiny (Charles Andrew Gardner, Cage Sebastian Pierre, and Trent Davis), find themselves trapped in a cosmic waiting room somewhere between life and final rest. Though all charming and funny, the four men couldn't be more different from one another, ranging in age and life experiences. However, one painful truth binds them together. Each of their lives has been stolen from the earth at the hands of anti-black racial violence— a wicked, endless reality symbolized by a printer onstage sputtering names of the lost. Sandra Bland, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, Laquan McDonald. Ijames' characters fulfill the Black Lives Matter movement's call to "say their names". And as they speak them, one by one, the dead are raised with compassion and honor.

As "Kill Move Paradise" so courageously elucidates, the work of raising the dead is not easy nor is it comfortable. To raise the names of black Americans like Sandra Bland and Laquan McDonald is to see the needlessness of their deaths. To ask why those deaths occurred is to see the brutal American landscape of police brutality, systemic racism, and white complacency. By inviting the voices of the silenced dead into the theatre, Clark provokes the audience to listen and reflect on their role (conscious or unconscious) in the anti-blackness that ends the lives of people like Isa, Daz, Grif, and Tiny every single day in America.

For as much pain and complexity the play holds, Wardell Julius Clark has accomplished something brilliant in creating a world equally as full of joy and hope. Ealy, Gardner, Pierre, and Davis' performances are ripe with compassion, humor, and brightness. The bond and solidarity between not only the characters but the actors themselves is palpable. Their heartening delight in one another provides audiences with a hopeful instruction of how to move forward in the face of adversity— with love.

Ijames' direct breaks of the fourth wall are inarguably bold, ranging from tough questions to outright accusations. The efficacy of such provocative tactics is an inevitable question: is it possible to mobilize

audiences to work for change by calling them out? Only time will tell the answer, but my hope is that love for the characters this production has so beautifully crafted will carry audiences to fight for that desired end: unity and equity for all.

The medium of live theatre requires a certain kind of voyeurism. “Kill Move Paradise” not only acknowledges this but takes advantage of it. The audience is forced to witness the impossible odds the characters face, represented by the steep halfpipe that makes up the set. Over and over again, the characters struggle to climb the wall. Over and over again, they slip before they reach the top and tumble down, thrashing.

After sitting still, watching, and reflecting, I left “Kill Move Paradise” ready to take action and move— with love— towards a world where black lives truly matter.