

Clybourne Park' addresses race through humor

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.



Play runs at the Guthrie through Aug. 4

The subject of race has proven to be a difficult and complicated discussion to have, but the Pulitzer Prize winning "Clybourne Park" uses biting humor to address race in America.

Set against the backdrop of a singular home in a Chicago neighborhood, "Clybourne Park" is a two-act play with the first act taking place in 1959 when the neighborhood was all white and the first African-American family moves in and the second act in modern day when the neighborhood has flipped and is totally African-American and being gentrified. The 2012 Tony Award winner for Best Play, "Clybourne" is billed as a satirical response to Lorraine Hansberry's iconic book, "Raisin in the Sun."



Sha' Cage, a lead actress in the play, who plays different characters – a maid to owners of the home in the first act and a neighborhood matriarch in the second – said "Clybourne Park" is a catalyst to audiences opening their minds – and eventually their mouths – to truly discuss race and racism in America.

"It's humorous how we as humans can dance around the real issues of race and class in America," said Cage, who was born in Mississippi, but has lived in Minneapolis for 16 years and is a graduate of Macalester College in St. Paul. "The writer (Bruce Norris) is very skillful in using comedy to tackle this very serious subject of race. I wasn't big on comedy until the last couple of

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years, but now I see how it can be used in a skillful way to help people to start talking."

According to Cage, conversations between audience members begins almost the moment the final curtain falls.



"The other day we had a post-play dialogue with some members of the audience and I had a great feeling of relief knowing that people are walking away and continuing to have needed conversations about race," said Cage. "Audiences are laughing hysterically and are able to walk out and have conversations that before I think political correctness got in the way of."

"Clybourne Park" is directed by Lisa Peterson, and along with Cage stars, Ansa Akyea, Emily Gunyou Halaas, Peter Christian Hansen, Stephen Lee Johnson, Jim Lichtscheidi, Bill McCallum and Kathryn Meisle. The play is currently running at the Guthrie, 818 S. 2nd St., Minneapolis, and runs through Aug. 4. Adult tickets range from \$25 - \$70 depending on day and seating and can be purchased online at www.guthrietheater.org .