

Shakespeare & Company, Lenox, MA

**Hymn**, by Lolita Chakrabarti.

Directed by Reggie Life. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

**"A person's life is made up of pieces, like a jigsaw puzzle. . ."**

If a stranger approached you at your father's funeral, admitted he didn't know your father or anyone in your family and was hesitant to speak to you, you'd probably thank him for coming and expect him to leave. That would be proper and appropriate. This scenario almost plays out at the beginning of Lolita Chakrabarti's play "Hymn" on stage at Shakespeare & Company's Elayne P. Bernstein Theatre in Lenox, Massachusetts. But the author hands us a surprise, a different outcome and it lead to a dramatic Bromance that plays on until another death interferes with its progress. The two men, Benny played by "ranney" and Gilbert played by Kevin Craig West, build a relationship based on their "Y" chromosomes and it is tender yet tenuous at best. Chakrabarti has built a two-person play upon this skimpy premise and she has done a fine job of erecting this building made of blood and guts. Gil and Benny do not become instant friends though they are the same age, of similar weight/body type, and similar psychological make-ups. They become friends because they ultimately need one another to be complete and whole.



: "ranney" and Kevin Craig West; Photo: Nile Scott Studio

In an episodic series of scenes their friendship cautiously grows until what becomes a special relationship seems to have been inevitable. They are six days apart in age, so they have experienced life together, though apart. Benny, an only child, is from a single parent home; Gilbert is from a large family with three sisters. Benny's lifestyle allows for public drunkenness and public displays of anger while Gilbert, a small-time businessman, is more reserved, more



“ranney”; Photo: Nile Scott Studio

conservative and careful with his public life. They are a peculiar example of “opposites attracting.” But there is more underneath that pulls them into this friendship and it is that which the play divulges. Director Reggie Life has carefully woven together the disparate elements that make these men who they are and puts them together into an indissoluble entity, a special brotherhood which is what drives this play forward.

Benny is played by “ranney” and he makes a most believable character come to life with his alternating personality: reticent, then bold; kind, then cruel; charming, then disarming. He progresses slowly from commonplace to upper middle-class. He does it all well and becomes an empathetic man.

Gil is played by Kevin Craig West. As his affections advance he moves from the stuffiness of a man moving upward yet devoted to his sisters, to an over-aged boy who finds new brotherhood to be too much fun to miss. What his combination of ambition and wilfulness does is part of the plot so I won't spill any secrets here. It's enough to say that his new devotion to another man brings him to an awfully outrageous decision which he saves with a simple pair of notes.



Kevin Craig West  
Photo: Nile Scott Studio

The play is stunning. Life and his two actors do a beautiful job with this material. It is well designed by Juliana Von Haubrich (sets), Katie Ward (lights), Amie Jay (costumes) and Brendan F. Doyle (sound). Kevin G. Coleman has contributed fight choreography and Sheila Bandyopadhyay has done the dances. You won't see another play like this one this year, so take a chance and see it.

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**Hymn** plays at the Elayne P. Bernstein Theatre at Shakespeare & Company, 70 Kemble Street, Lenox, MA through August 28. For information and tickets call 413-637-3353 or go on line at [www.shakespeare.org](http://www.shakespeare.org).