

Sharon Playhouse, Sharon, CT

*A Raisin in the Sun*, by Lorraine Hansberry.

Directed by Spencer Scott Barros. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

*“In my mother’s house there is still God.”*



The Younger Family  
played by (l - r):

Donnell E. Smith  
as Walter Lee,  
Kara F. Green  
as Beneatha.  
Marjorie Johnson  
as Lena,  
Maya Carter  
as Ruth,  
Kennadi Mitchell  
as Travis;

Photo: Amanda Dixon

What hasn't been written about Lorraine Hansberry's play "A Raisin in the Sun"? It is a brilliant and starkly honest look at a lower middle class family in South Chicago in the 1950s on the move thanks to an insurance check. There is trouble over how to spend the money and at the same time there is trouble over family issues, education and marriage issues, present and future. The family happen to be Black; there is thought of moving into an all white suburb; there is some racial friction and personal trauma. In the end Clybourne Park becomes a destination and a goal. The rest is all in the playing.

In a recent production in this region the final moments were changed to give the play to the future of the family, to grandson Travis, but at the Sharon Playhouse the director and the company wisely restored the play to its rightful center, to Grandma Lena, a woman about to take a major step into modern-day racial relations. At the Sharon Playhouse the play felt good, looked and sounded good and at the climax all was right in the Youngers' personal world, just as it should be.



Maya Carter, Donnell E. Smith.  
Photo: Amanda Dixon

Lena Younger's husband has died and an insurance policy is about to be settled, thereby providing her with \$10,000, a large sum of money for the time of the play. Her small, one-bedroom, ghetto apartment houses her and her 20 year old daughter Beneatha, her son Walter Lee and his wife Ruth, and their ten-year-old son Travis. Lena has longed for a home and hopes to use the money to find a larger, better residence for her family. Her son, a growing opportunist, wants to invest in a business and her daughter aspires to medical school. Clearly their interests do not coincide. With all this the principal conflict in the play is the issue of family between Ruth and Walter Lee. He is played by handsome Donnell E. Smith and she by lovely Maya Carter. They make a volatile couple totally believable. As Ruth does the day, Carter begins the play with unwarranted hostility. Her Ruth knows more about her situation than she is willing or able to let on and she takes it out on the routine of existence in the Younger household. Carter's strength works against her needed sympathy-play with the audience but she ultimately brings it home to her Ruth in the second act. Smith's Walter Lee is also playing the harsher, more ego-centric aspects of his character. He may be good to look at but he is hard to take as he fights with Ruth, Beneatha and Travis, even taking aim at Lena, who loves with all her heart.

Marjorie Johnson gives Lena a beauty and a grace that solidly define her for us. She moves with considered care as she deals with her children. She employs subtlety where it works and uses personal fury only when she deems it necessary. Johnson is superb and she carries through the play a humanity that gives her the right to be Hansberry's ideal of a family leader.

Beneatha, as played by Kara F. Green, is an explosion of insecurity. The girl wants so much out of life that she cannot be anything other than loud and brash and the perfect example of

how teenagers react to their own possibilities. The character's mood swings are perfectly explored by this actress who can easily out-shout the balance of the company without even trying. Her suitors are uneven and they are acted in exactly the right way by Michael Gene Jacobs as George Murchison, an up-and-coming young executive type and Nii Adu Clerk as Asagai, the Nigerian student who woos with words, gifts and dance. Her nephew, Travis, is well played by Kennadi Mitchell. Walter's friend Bobo is played by Ronnie Reed. The white man, the villain Karl Lindner, is rightly performed by Dick Terhune who give the man no chance to survive his assigned "community" duty.



Marjorie Johnson;  
Photo: Amanda Dixon



Nii Adu Clerk, Kara F. Green;  
Photo: Amanda Dixon

They play's three act format is maintained and Hansberry's structure plays sensibly over the two hours

and forty minutes it takes to tell its story properly. The audiences at the Sharon Playhouse are seated on the stage and the Youngers' apartment show its back to the traditional seating. This gives the show an intimacy that allows you to feel like a neighbor in this slum-world they inhabit. The set and fine sound design are by Justin Boccitto, the perfect costumes have been created by Antonio Consuegra and Kathleen DeAngelis. The excellent lighting design for an apartment with no access to real daylight is by Alix Lewis. Kurt Alger created the very good period wigs.

It is always good to come to a play that has been respected by its creative team and this is a perfect example of that. "A Raisin in the Sun" may be an old play but it touches on many of today's issues and addresses them from the past, the present and the future simultaneously. You can't ask for more than that and it is certainly what good theatre is really all about.

+ 10/08/2022 +

**A Raisin in the Sun** plays at the Sharon Playhouse, 49 Amenia Road, Sharon, CT through October 16. For information and tickets call 860-364-7469 ext. 201 or go on line to [www.SharonPlayhouse.org](http://www.SharonPlayhouse.org).