

Black Theatre Troupe of Upstate New York, Albany, NY  
**The Mountaintop**, by Katori Hall. Directed by Michael A. Lake  
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

*“Goddamn, I want to talk to God.”*

Martin Luther King, Jr. died on April 4, 1968. The night before he spent alone in a motel room in Memphis, Tennessee. Katori Hall’s riveting play, directed with a combination of joy and

perception by Michael A. Lake for the Black Theatre Troupe of Upstate New York in Albany, examines the improbable scenario that took place in Room 306 of the Lorraine Motel. It is so bizarre a concept that it just might be true. After all, it was MLK Jr. and not just anyone.



A hotel maid on her first night brings him coffee and turns his final hours into a triumph of personality that becomes inescapable once you’ve seen it. This production is a singular triumph for Lake and his two fine actors, Iniabasi Nelson and Angelique Powell.

Kept together by necessity (she has a very special motivation) they spar, fall in love, fall out of love and fall into an arrangement that is unique and unexpected. She brings him to a very subtle climax that is equally surprising for him and

Angelique Powell, Iniabasi Nelson; Photo:Willie David Short V

for us as well. Amazing things happen

like God hanging up on him in the middle of a conversation (I won't explain; you have to see it). Nelson handles this beautifully as he does the rest of the peculiar action in the play.

Powell has the more difficult role in the play. Her maid is not just in service, she has a special connection to the world and all it contains. As we come to better understand her Katori Hall's realistic play becomes the ultimate fantasy and the fantastic becomes sublimely realistic. We laugh at the lines and the situation and, later, we tear up as Camae's needs become defined for us. Powell presents her service personnel with so much reality it is easy to deal with her own recent problems that have brought her to this new job. It's a beautiful performance.



Iniabasi Nelson; Photo:Wille David Short V

I've seen two other productions of "The Mountaintop" and have loved them all, but this one is special. It presents its characters and their awkward situation with a genuine sense of reality that allows us believe the impossible, accept it as reality and move with it toward intended tragedy, one we already know about but actually forget for a while as the play progresses inevitably toward it.



Angelique Powell;  
Photo: Willie David Short V

The physical production is wonderful. Set and projection designer Nora Marlow Smith has done a fine job with both aspects of the production. Sheilah London-Miller has provided perfect costumes for the actors and Nicolas Nealon's lighting swings from realistic to fantastic perfectly. Director Michael A Lake has given BTTUNY one of its finest shows and anyone interested in fine theater is hereby commanded to attend. This is one theatrical experience you must not miss!

+ 02/03/2024 +

**The Moutaintop**, is presented by Black Theatre

Troupe of Upstate New York through February 11 on the mainstage at Capital Rep, 251 North Pearl Street, Albany, New York For information and tickets go to their website: [www.blacktheatretroupeupstateny.org](http://www.blacktheatretroupeupstateny.org)