

TheRep, Albany, NY - WORLD PREMIERE
Three Mothers by Ajene D. Washington. Directed by Petronia Paley.
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

“I feel responsible. . .”

Three mothers of murdered sons spend time together trying to piece together one another’s lives. Their sons, killed in Meridian, Mississippi while registering black voters in 1964, are the emotional provocateurs in this play about what comes after death. Anne Schwermer, a schoolteacher, thinks she knows what they all need and believes that her son’s death is her own fault. She has, after all, encouraged his desires and needs to help others. Carolyn Goodman takes a more intellectual view of how things have played out. Fanny Lee Chaney mourns her loss and prepares to experience another with her younger son. The first two women are white, Jewish northerners and Fanny is black, southern and a native of Meridian. Three more unlikely companions have never existed and yet they are tied through the unholy losses they suffer.



Judith Lightfoot Clarke, Trisha Jeffrey, Cheryl Stern; Photo: Lorraine Toth

Ajene D. Washington’s play is a historic look back at a time when women did what was “right” and accepted what was wrong. His three ladies, however, come to grips with what is very wrong in their world and deal with it in a serious fashion that forces them to forget themselves and focus on an uncertain future. Much of the play uses attitude and dialogue to establish each of the women. However, when the script allows them the emotional freedom they require to fully express their opinions and feelings the play become as fine a work as I’ve seen anywhere.



Trisha Jeffrey; Photo: Lorraine Toth

Trisha Jeffrey as Fanny has many, many moments of emotional breakdown. She tells the other two that if their sons had not been killed along with her own son, James, nothing would have ever been done about his death. This sets a tone for the play and Jeffrey is a dynamic Fanny playing her character with an electric persona. She is on top of things when she needs to be and is a fine surrogate for the black women who constantly suffered the KKK in her home-town.

Cheryl Stern plays Anne Schwermer, the one woman with a sense of humor. She jokes, she cajoles, she almost flat-lines forgetting her most common unnatural gesture - straightening her dress - when the emotional realization of her own loss, her son Mickey, overtakes her. Stern is a brilliant actress with heavy challenges in this part as a woman who appears self-sacrificing when she is at best only sublimating.

Judith Lightfoot Clarke plays Carolyn Goodman, a clinical psychologist, approaches her son Andrew's death as a professional would for as long as she can, but when finally confronted with truths she doesn't want to

acknowledge, her practical self gives way to the woman underneath and her perfect facade crumbles a bit. Clarke is just as good as her two compatriots and her performance is sometimes too hard to handle, at least for us.

On a stunning set designed by Baron E. Pugh director Petronia Paley has driven this vehicle with sensitive assurance. Kylee Loera's projections keep the play almost too real underlining the sensitive script with visuals that move us as much as they do the characters. The lighting designed by Devorah Kengmana and the costumes crafted by Elvira Bovenzi Blitz work perfectly.

This is a play that deserves to be seen and felt by everyone. It's new and it's perfect.

+ 05/08/2024 +



Judith Lightfoot Clarke, Cheryl Stern; Photo: Lorraine Toth

Three Mothers plays at theRep,
251 North Pearl Street, Albany through May 12. Tickets are available at (518) 346-6204.