

Barrington Stage Company, Pittsfield, MA  
**Primary Trust**, by Eboni Booth. Directed by Jennifer Chang.  
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

*“This is where my story begins.”*

Kenneth has a story to tell about his life. He is an orphan with little education and very little love to talk about. He has worked for twenty years in a small, used book store in the wrong part of town and when his boss, the owner, decides to move away and close the store, Kenneth is left with only two things to sustain himself: his best friend, Bert, and two-for-one Maitaies at a local bar. He is a man lost in nowhere, going nowhere. As close as they are Bert has secrets that he keeps close. Kenneth knows what they are, has known all along what they are, but he refuses to allow them to upset his limited world. But then Corrina, a waitress at the bar, takes an interest in Kenneth and recommends that he apply for a job in a bank named Primary Trust. His mother worked in a bank when he still had her. He applies.



Kyle Haden, Justin Weaks; Photo: Daniel Rader.

Ninety minutes later, our time, Kenneth finds what he’s been looking for all his life without ever knowing it. That is how his story, temporarily, ends. This Pulitzer Prize winning tale by Eboni Booth is exactly what the Pulitzer was designed for: to illustrate an aspect of American life. It is an excellent play, well worth your time and attention.

Booth knows how to extract comedy out of the worst situations. Her laughs come

naturally and honestly. This slice of life drama gives more than it demands of us as its audience. The director, Jennifer Chang, has played openly with the St. Germain stage's space to bring us an unfamiliar world. She, Booth, and the cast of the play draw us in quickly to Kenneth's mind and experiences and gradually move us back out of it to leave us enlightened and just a bit frightened of what our own futures might hold. It's a unique experience.



Justin Weaks,, Hilary Ward; Photo: Daniel Rader.

Justin Weaks plays Kenneth with an honesty and openness that is refreshing and fulsome. He never pushes Kenneth to be more than he is or can be. When he ultimately loses his temper it is as dynamic as anything written by Arthur Miller or Williams Inge. When he loves someone it is with complete candor. When he loses his only friend it is with human resignation and the smallest amount of pain. He plays it all perfectly.

Hilary Ward plays all of the women in Kenneth's ongoing life, and one man. She so very clearly defines them all we never need to ask ourselves who is she now. We know because she lets us know. As Corrina she is loveable; as the bank customer she is so familiar that we can hate her with the ease of familiarity. She is simply a wonderful actress doing a great job.

C. David Johnson plays all of the white men in this black man's life. Like Ward he quite easily defines each of them so that we always know who he is. It's a bit easier for him because once a character is gone, he's gone forever. Even so, his definition of each is beautifully specific. He is an asset to the story Kenneth is telling us.



C. David Johnson, Justin Weaks; Photo: Daniel Rader.

Bert, Kenneth's friend, is invisible to the other people in the man's life. This is mostly true because he doesn't matter to them. The many other people in Kenneth's life have their own interests and

Kenneth plays a part in their lives but doesn't, for the most part, affect them at all. Booth has brilliantly imagined what all of us go through, knowing people who notice us when it becomes necessary but don't necessarily notice those around us. Kyle Haden plays Bert exquisitely. In Kenneth's job interview scene for the bank, he is as integral as anyone could possibly be and yet his presence is only special to Kenneth and to us. Kenneth has put his primary trust in his close friend and he is not betrayed even a bit.

The physical production for this final Barrington Stage production of the season is as simple as Kenneth himself. A straightforward street scene has been designed by Baron E. Pugh. Costumes and pieces have come from the creative mind of Danielle Preston. Bryan Ealey has devised a lighting plot that is almost as intriguing as the play itself.

I enjoyed this play from start to finish. I think you will also. Opening night was sold out with a waiting list for cancellations. Don't wait to reserve your tickets. They could be as hard to come by as Kenneth's dreams of a future life might be.

+ 09/22/2024 +

**Primary Trust** plays through October 13 at the St. Germain Stage in the Lee and Sydelle Blatt Center for the Performing Arts, 36 Linden Street, Pittsfield. For tickets and information go to [www.barringtonstageco.org](http://www.barringtonstageco.org) or call 413-236-8888.