

Black Theatre Troupe of Upstate New York, Albany, NY
Berta, Berta by Angelica Chéri. Directed by Michael A. Lake.
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

“If you gonna squash my watermelons, I’ll kill you.”



Sadrina Renee. Alvin Kershaw;
Photo: Willie David Short V

Loving is difficult in Meridian, Mississippi on May 1, 1925, the day the cicadas make their anticipated return, at least for Berta and Leroy, historic lovers who’ve been apart for years. She has married, given birth to a stillborn son, lost her husband and lived on an unproductive farm. He has been out of touch, in prison, and is very possibly headed back there after killing a man who verbally abused the woman he loves. This 80 minute two-hander is amusing and heart-breaking as author Angelica Chéri tells it. On director Michael A. Lake’s three room set Sadrina Renee and Alvin Kershaw play their story with grace and passion and their very professional abilities. You can’t help falling in love with these troubled people as they live through their traumas and their needs.

Kershaw is handsome and his character is so sincerely written and played that you just want to open your arms and give him a hug. His final moments are distressing and difficult but Leroy has played his part in Berta’s life and hopefully given her exactly

what she needs to move on with her life. We cannot imagine what will happen to him next, but we can surmise that there is nothing as good as the three and a half hours he has spent with her. He has fulfilled old promises and created new hopes. There is nothing left for him but trouble and despair and he won’t share that with the woman he loves.

Berta has her own troubles, including a belief in the magical power of the cicadas, a seventeen year phenomenon. Her personal grief has been pinned to their arrival and the fact that Leroy has appeared at the same time gives her additional hope. Sadrina Renee plays every emotion Berta experiences with verve that has emotional impact on the audience. An alert and forthright woman who seemingly has no secrets, Berta is actually fueled by her past and the oddness of her life. She keeps her darkest secret in a box in her living room and Renee works with the props involved so movingly I found myself engulfed in tears as she exposed to Leroy what motivates her.

This is a play like no other I have seen, and I have seen a lot of plays in my lifetime. There is rarely a moment when the two players are still and those are all utterly romantic. Lake has kept Berta as active as a person could be at two o'clock in the morning. Leroy, on the other hand, facing disgrace and arrest, is as calm a human being as possible, an amazing feat of control. The way in which he responds to her



Sadrina Renee. Alvin Kershaw;
Photo: Willie David Short V



Sadrina Renee Photo: Willie David Short V;

would make him as fidgety as Berta, but instead his calm is sometimes chilling.

The Black Theatre Troupe of Upstate New York has a hit on its hands and the full house was a tribute to the company, the play, and the artists involved. With limited seating I would suggest you make your reservations very soon for this exceptionally theatrical evening. It will be something you will remember for the rest of your life.

+ 09/19/2024 +

Berts Berta plays at Captial Rep on N. Pearl St. in Albany, NY through October 27. For information of tickets call 518-346-6204.