

Black Theatre Troupe of Upstate New York, Albany, NY
Eclipsed by Danai Gurira. Directed by Jean-Remy Monnay.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“You don’t know what’s waiting, little friend.”

#4, The Girl, is given every chance to succeed as a kidnapped “wife” in Liberia in 2003 during the second Civil War. She, and two of her compatriots, now belong to the commander of a LURD rebel army camp with no rights to make any decisions of their own. One of their number has escaped the lurid sexual apprenticeship by becoming a rebellious rebel soldier on her own. And supervising the well-being of the captured women is another woman, a former successful business-woman named Rita who now serves the commander in other ways while fiercely maintaining her self-respect by taking charge of things over which she has no control. These are the five characters in Danai Gurira’s fine play, *Eclipsed*, now on stage produced by The Black Theatre Troupe of Upstate New York in Albany’s Capital Repertory headquarters.

Director Jean-Remy Monnay has given the five actresses a wide variety of hostile actions and motivations to play as they manage their Liberian accents. It is often difficult to bear up under the angry ripostes they deliver so deftly. He has instilled in his cast all the hatred and anger the real women must have felt and those emotions play out so well on his intimate stage that the play has heft and strength, vigor and the disdainful attitude needed to make the playwright’s points. These women have courage and strength and all the motivation they need to survive the war they are physically caught up in.



Monet Thompson-Young, Zilpa Oduor; Photo: Willie Davis Short V

One of them is pregnant, #3, and her basic instincts rise above the possible decisions she might make. #3 is played with sensitivity by Alanna Aleece. The final images of her with her baby are truly unforgettable. Aleece’s character is gentle and sympathetic in spite of her final decision to remain in the custody of her kidnapper because he is the father of her child. We deeply desire her freedom from that tyranny, but #3 (Bessie) is determined to make things work out for her child.



Deesia Clarke (in rear: Alanna Aleece, Angelique Powell); Photo: Willie Davis Short V

#4, the newest capture, played by Deasa Clarke, struggles with her situation and manages to experience the various options open to her including training for warfare under the auspices of #2. She has the most varied role in the play. She retains sympathy even as she progresses through her soldier training which includes killing men. She has a pensive face and graceful body and manages to be both feminine and masculine at times.

Zilpa Oduor as the militant, rude, aggressive #2 is absolutely convincing in the role, scaring her fellow female soldier

and the audience as well. While her performance could be considered “over-the-top” she plays with so much reality and self-assurance that she comes off brilliantly in her manly, military manner.

Equally aggressive, though in a different way, Angelique Powell’s #1 is exotically strong and definitive. We know her for the bully she is. We resent her treatment of #4 and yet we understand it and appreciate it. Powell is a marvel, switching back and forth, sometimes in mid-phrase, between the very different aspects of her character’s character.

Monet Thompson-Young’s Rita embraces the task of controlling the moods of the other characters in this play, a difficult task indeed considering their hidden anger and resentment of their situations in the war-torn country they live in. Imagine, if you can, being a young woman, presumably innocent, forced into the hardships of wartime prostitution. This is their lot, their reward for loyalty to their homeland. Thompson-Young manages to give Rita the humanity that is missing in some of the others.

Monnay displays his own sense of who these women are, both in life and in their characters. He has imbued them with individualism and charm, all the while keeping us aware of their difficult exposure to the war that surrounds them. It is excellent work.

D. Colin’s full stage set gives the play motion as it transports us from place to place well lit by lighting designer Laura Darling. However, the



Zilpa Oduor, Alanna Aleece, Angelique Powell, Desia Clarke; Photo: Willie Davis Short V

design triumph for this production belongs to Sheilah London Miller for her costumes hair and makeup designs. The cast is dressed for regional color and shape and each character is instantly delineated in their looks. In the second act when facts of the day have altered, so have most of the characters through her costumes and hair. We instantly see how time has passed and how the women have changed in every conceivable way.

The first Liberian Civil War spanned the years 1987 to 1997. The second war, which is documented in this play, lasted from 1999 to 2003. In this play we are in the final term of the conflict and that is well observed and served by the playwright, the actors and the director. This is an unusual drama, laughs included, that shows us the less public side of war and its human horrors and liberations. It is a play that deserves to be seen; it is both a lesson and a tract devoted to history and humanity. It is riveting drama and this production serves it very well.

+ 05/30/2025 +

Eclipsed plays in the Lauren and Harold Iselin Studio at theRep, 251 North Pearl Street, Albany, New York through June 8. For information and tickets call the box office at 518-346-6204.