

theRep, Albany, NY

Rosie is Red and Everybody Else is Blue, by John Spellos. Directed by Reginald L. Douglas.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

“Everything is wrong and I am right!”

In Albany, New York,, now, a family of two - or three - live in a house supported by the matriarchal figure, Rosie, who holds several jobs, principally that of school bus driver. She is a very controlling widow with an adult son and a cranky brother-in-law who lives with them. Since the death of her husband, whose ashes she hold dear, she has been the angry, controlling individual who rules her roost. She will accept nothing less than absolute obedience. In spite of her basic character Rosie is a very funny woman. And this play, which I expected to be political based on the title, is a very moving, very amusing comedy. A comedy - basically a play in which nobody dies - is just what is needed at this time. Capital Repertory (theRep) has delivered a world premiere, a 2023 NEXT ACT! Winner, comedy about four Black community members embroiled in what could be considered a Mary Tyler Moore-like situation play.

Rosie is played expertly by Inga Ballard. She fumes and fusses and fulminates throughout the first act. She plays a woman whom no man can satisfy. Her fury shows no sign of abating until an incident lays her low. However, even in a stricken state she manages one final insult that brings down the lights with hearty laughter. In the second act she has softer moments that charm us and compel a warmer form of comedy which takes us by the scruff of the neck and shoves us into a complacent confidence that things could turn out just right. Ballard plays it all with a talent to amuse that keeps the play alive and real and frighteningly sweet. When she awakens a memory about Vanessa, the girl Rosie’s son intends to marry, the play conveys us to another place where mother’s love sometimes hides but rather waits to embrace the world.

Vanessa is played by Maya Jackson who gives the girl both heart and soul. She is a girl with a history and a perfect match for Rosie’s son Chris whose life hasn’t gotten off to a proper start before meeting her. Chris (the actor Chris Blunt) has a natural charm which eludes his mother’s notice but which enthralls Vanessa. Blunt and Jackson make a perfect pair and their characters use and display this perfectly.

As Rosie’s devoted, live-in relative Lenny, Montae Russell has undertaken the hardest role of all, creating a full-blown person, scoffed at and ignored, who can manage the menage in which he lives with style and power and still remain in the background. Russell does a fine job making Lenny the most important individual in the bunch.

Director Reginald L. Douglas has staged the play extremely well, focusing our attention on the right places at the right time, but it is the actors’ intensity that captures us. He has been ably assisted by his design team, most notably costume designer Karen Perry who dresses Rosie in costumes that express her strength and her moods. Set designer Alexander Woodward has created a bi-level set for Rosie’s home that shows us the influence of the 1960s and the necessary adornments of today.

This show is a surprise for me. I expected something different but was pleased to sit and enjoy a comedy about a family in deep need for love and appreciation. It was better than television and more outrageous than movies. It was red for Rosie and darkly blue for her son and brother-in-law but Vanessa's faith in memory lit up the stage. You'll enjoy this one for sure.

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Rosie is Red and Everybody Else is Blue plays at Capital Repertory Theatre, 251 North Pearl Street, Albany, New York through May 18. For information and tickets go to (518) 346-6204 .