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"Two Ships Passing"
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Good news today. The successful run of "Two Ships Passing" now playing at the Pan Andreas Theater has been extended to June 20th.

I recommend you go. It is an opportunity to watch a dedicated and very talented company bring a fine piece of theater to life.

The story takes place in 1962 in Boston. The Civil Rights movement has begun in other parts of the country in large arenas but this story plays out in fine detail in the confines of one family, and in this delicate piece the personal choices and intricacies that will be exposed to change by the movement are foreshadowed with subtlety and grace.

Two African American sisters, Doris Ship Murphy played by Claudia Mason, and Loreen Ship played by Barbara Koval were brought up by their Mother to pass as white.

Doris has been married for ten years to Daniel Murphy who is the quintessential Boston Irish 'Young JFK' prototype. She has kept her background a secret and it has remained her choice to 'pass'. Loreen, her grown sister has come into another truth for herself and is marrying a very dark skinned professor from Africa. She wants her real African American father, who they both have been estranged from to be part of the wedding but there is an immutable conflict. For him to give away the bride Loreen, is to give away the settled, upwardy mobile Doris. As much as the bride wants to be given away by her father in both senses, the married sister does not. 'Ships that Pass' is a clever piece and a living breathing examination of the changing parameters of a specific time and place.

Playwright Pete Reisenberg got the atmosphere exactly right.

The story plays out in the bar and the sitting room at a grand Boston Hotel where Doris and Daniel have come to stay for the wedding. This is a ten character play, of archetypes

and with great efficiency, the nuances and resonances of love, loyalty, racial discrimination, valor, humanity and inhumanity mainstay the piece. Some characters must change and reevaluate, some cannot.

The bar scenes function to bring out the strong contrasting racial viewpoints and choices among the men characters. Daniel is played by Sean Christian, a more Kennedy- esque actor I cannot imagine. He has worked up a genuine 'Cape Co-haad' accent and with it he masterfully conveys a man who sees beyond race into the human heart. He can also be a hot head about his convictions, and after several scotches, blasts the refusing bartender and the discriminating policy he wields against his father in law. There is John, Daniel's brother, who functions as peacekeeper and protector of his brother's marriage. Doug Bellitto, as John Murphy did a magnificent job in the ensemble scenes and showed wit, fire and strength in strong monologues that straightened out the disturbed and refusing 'bahtendah' and put a DAR Society snob firmly in check. As Gordon Ship, the estranged father, William Stanford Davis is compelling and understated. Ship is a simple man, a train conductor who loved his family and was torn up when their mother took the girls away to live another life. He does not want to cause either one of them pain, but he does have to decide which daughter's wishes to respect. In smaller parts but equally important are the bartender played by Thomas Michael Clemons and the cocktail waitress Sandy, played by Jennifer Blake. These two are subtle, and fine in their stalwart unity to uphold the status quo. Their eyes meet furtively in silent agreement to refuse service, and so much is said in that look. Sandy is perfectly cast and created, from her too big false eyelashes and sexy cocktail outfit to the way she puts down each characters drink in front of them. Her personal judgments go with her service. Clemons character is not so smooth, an ex marine he brooks no change, and it makes him angry to have to contemplate it. All the touch points among these characters illuminate deep issues like a social kaleidoscope made of human decisions and conflicts.

The women of the piece largely play out their story upstairs in the parlor of Doris and Daniels' rooms. These women are wonderful together. The ensemble work is finely wrought, as they examine each other's choices, and the reason's they are so fundamentally different. They struggle with each other and honestly look for ways to stay connected to each other even with this issue of such large stakes to both of them on the table. Doris 'passes' in her life, but we watch her pay for it in her psyche. Her whiteness is her reality, yet we watch her check her face in the mirror over and over and unconsciously reach for pale powder to dab over her complexion so it is perfect. She is nervous when the tea she ordered up is slow to be delivered. She doesn't name the fear, but we get it loud and clear in the audience. This is

wonderful layered work by Claudia Mason. Equally strong is Barbara Koval. More fiery of the two, Barbara drives the scenes by virtue of her character's wants and needs. Her needs are of the heart, not the head. It is not just ideology here, or simple right and wrong. Her needs come from her childhood memories and longing to connect to who she really is inside. Barbara moved the audience deeply showing us the pain and longing for her father to be her father in public, and triumphing with integrity when she had to compromise her needs for her sister's choice.

It was such a wise choice of the playwright to create this story from the human side. No one here tells anybody else what they should do, nobody ever preaches, there are no position papers. They simply continue to look for the best truth they can live with and try to respect each other's choices. Like most of life this is a lumpy process. Reisenberg compels us to hold each other with care while considering complexity. These days on a worldwide front, it is a model that many leaders are not able to practice and would do well to remember.

Other characters who did fine work are Marsha Loring as the DAR grand dame Mrs. Hooker. She is menacing and threatening and represents the inhumanity of her old guard with aplomb. Amos Cowson plays Maurice the fiancé with dignity and grace under pressure. Ernie King as the tea cart waiter brings innocence and strength to his important telling role. This play is a most worthy contribution to our theater culture.

"Ships that Pass" performances also make another worthy contribution. The opening performances benefit the non-profit charity, Team Survivor Los Angeles, an organization providing free fitness and wellness programs to women living with cancer. For more information about Team survivor call 310-477-8557.

Don't let "Ships that Pass" pass you by. Go and see. Watch a great play, watch great ensemble work, watch a great stage crew transform the imaginative set, enjoy being in place where true commitment puts out a quality stage event.