

## **READY, SET, GO PICT BRINGING TOUGH CONVERSATIONS TO THE STAGE WITH RACE**

From the starting blocks to the finish line, David Mamet's *Race* is a sprint through a minefield of thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes that set us against each other and separate us from one another. It's 90 minutes of permission for the self-righteous judge within us all to step down and back long enough to get a panoramic view of the unwritten, sometimes unspoken, and often unjustified laws that govern our interactions.

The Pittsburgh Irish classical theater presents, for the first time in Pittsburgh, *Race* a work by a male, Jewish playwright unashamedly taking on issues of race, sex and class. These issues take center stage as partners at a law firm, one black and one white, must decide if they will represent a rich, white male accused of raping a black woman. The play is written with very rapid-fire, no holds barred dialogue that explodes with intensity from the start. The delicate nature of the subject matter is interspersed with comic relief that allows us to be humored by the realization of our own absurdities in such serious matters, breaking the ice of initial discomfort.

Four characters, Henry Brown (Alan Bomar Jones), Charles Strickland (Michael Fuller), Jack Lawson (John DeMita) and Susan (Casiha Flet) make up an excellently casted ensemble with great direction given by Andrew S. Paul. The partners of the law firm, Henry Brown (Jones) and Jack Lawson (John DeMita) have just the right chemistry between them, very aware of cultural differences but their mutual respect for each other professionally is apparent. These roles were not overplayed as one might expect but well balanced. Henry Brown is well played as intelligent yet not intimidating as stereotypes would suggest. Similarly, Jack Lawson (John DeMita) is not portrayed as all powerful or superior and does not seem to think himself to be so, also against the stereotypes.

Casiha Flet (who plays Susan) is to be applauded for not coming across as the typical, angry black woman. Instead she expertly allows her anger to be revealed in a way that makes us consider how she arrived at her indignation. The relationship between Susan and Brown as cultural counterparts is very well done in a way that reminds us that there is even opposition within the races.

Charles Strickland (Michael Fuller) does a great job of showing us the desperation of a man use to privilege being powerless in an unfortunate situation. We can clearly see that money doesn't make us less human or put us above problems.

The door and the windows of the law firm being set opposite the fourth wall coupled with the intimacy of the Heymann Theatre were very effective. It gave the feeling of being privy to behind-closed-doors conversations that we'd all be well served to hear.

*Race* is running through October 1 at the Henry Heymann Theater. A panel discussion is being held on October 1 at noon.