

Play Review: Bay Street Theater's Golden "Raisin in the Sun"

The Literature Live! production is certified theatrical gold!

David Taylor

 Cassia Thompson and Chauncy Thomas in Bay Street Theater's "A Raisin in the Sun," November 20, 2019
 Photo: Michael Heller



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troubled male lead, Walter Lee Younger, was of his insensitivity. Then, upon revisiting the material for [Bay Street Theater's Literature Live!](#) production, she began to see him in a new light—as someone struggling to prove his worth as a man to his family and to society at large. This revelation translates to a portrayal of the character that is somehow both larger than life and entirely relatable—serious and dramatic yet eccentric and fun—made possible by Chauncy Thomas's exemplary performance.

Commanding the audience's attention with every stage entrance, Thomas's Walter is possibly the most over-the-top, transcendent performance to grace the Bay Street stage in 2019, pushing the character to new heights through exaggerated line delivery and an unbelievable array of

dynamic facial expressions rivaling the great Jim Carrey. If you've seen or read this play 100 times, it's worth one more go for Thomas alone.

Thomas isn't alone onstage, however. He's surrounded by an immensely talented cast bringing their all to their respective roles. Erin Margaret Pettigrew portrays Walter's steadfast wife Ruth with enviable strength and endless emotional range. From the opening scene when she's trying to cook breakfast while getting her family up in time for work/school, the audience falls in love with her and wants nothing but the best for the deserving heroine.

Cooki Winborn portrays the religious matriarch of the family Lena Younger, aka Mama, with insurmountable poise and dignity. Speaking in a calm, quiet voice, Winborn offers sagely wisdom and selfless sentiments, only resorting to corporal punishment in one surprising scene when her daughter Beneatha defies her belief in the existence of God. Cassia Thompson, as Walter's younger sister Beneatha, has an enormous stage presence, thanks to her character's fiery, passionate personality and to her equally spirited performance. The scene where she dances in her African garb, later joined by Walter, is one of the most entertaining moments of the play and does well to break up some of the more intense, dramatic scenes.

Kaden Amari Anderson and Cooki Winborn in Bay Street Theater's "A Raisin in the Sun," Photo: Michael Heller

At only 10 years old, Kaden Amari Anderson has to have no trouble standing out among the older cast members, bringing forth loads of spunk and charm to the part of Travis Younger. [Joe Pallister](#) portrays the slimy, bigoted Karl Lindner flawlessly, delivering each duplicitous line with a cold, calculated tone.

With no intermission, the streamlined production comprises a perfect blend of intense drama and light-hearted moments, even packing a few laughs. Watching the Younger family bicker and argue over their late father's life insurance money is to sit on the battlefield of opposing dreams, unsure of who to side with. You do want Beneatha to have the money to become a doctor, and for Ruth and young Travis to move out of their cramped, run-down apartment and into a nice neighborhood. You'll likely also feel pity for Walter, who's overworked, unfulfilled and desperately needing someone to take a chance on him and his wishful plan to invest in a liquor store. Mixed into the play's central conflict are matters of racism, the existence of God, African heritage, abortion, marital strain and classism. Each issue is woven into the characters' stories in a way that layers them with enhanced depth and authenticity, allowing the audience to better understand their ideals.

At its core, Lorraine Hansberry's seminal 1959 play is about family, and Bay Street's production is must-see for families and individuals of any background. With inspired acting and brilliant directing, the show is certified theatrical gold!

A Raisin in the Sun *runs through December 1 at Bay Street Theater (1 Bay Street, Sag Harbor). For tickets and more information, visit baystreet.org.*



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