

Two River Theater's "A Raisin in the Sun"



by Sherri Rase

"What happens to a dream deferred...Does it dry up, like a raisin in the sun?" is what Langston Hughes asked in 1951 in his jazz poetry work "Harlem." Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun" provided one answer in 1959 and it is clear that the world that existed then is not all that different from the world that exists now.

In the Two River Theater production, Lena Younger's (Brenda Pressley) family lives in very close conditions. When her husband Big Walter passed, he had a life insurance policy, from which a bit of life changing money is coming their way. Lena has plans for the money, as the matriarch of the family, but her son Walter Lee (Brandon J. Dirden) has some plans of his own. Walter Lee is a man of dreams and he's feeling a bit parched at the time we first meet him.

Walter's wife Ruth (Crystal A. Dickinson) is the first one awake in the house and she's clearly a matriarch-to-be. Their son Travis (Owen Tabaka) sleeps on the family couch at night and Ruth has a secret of her own. Walter's sister Beneatha (Jasmine Batchelor) is attending college—something that Walter seems proud of her for doing, while also resenting her for being able to do it. He heads off daily to the never-ending service of

being a chauffeur for a wealthy white man, truly looking in from outside to daily deals, which he is certain he could orchestrate himself if he only had a chance. Lena buys her family a house in an all-white neighborhood, with part of the money, and when Karl Lindner (Nat DeWolf) comes calling from the Clybourne Park Improvement Committee, the pressure cooker really begins to heat up.

When Walter's dreams are deferred, he becomes a very different man. But Walter is not the only one whose dreams are changing. Beneatha has two suitors—the young college man from a wealthy black family, George Murchison (York Walker), and Joseph Asagai (Charlie Hudson III) who introduces Beneatha to literally another world. George's view is mapped out—he knows what his life will be and what he wants from it. Asagai recognizes that, while we plan, the future may hold something entirely different. We do not remain the same, and how we change continues throughout our lives to determine the course of our existence—heavy stuff for a young lady, who wants to practice medicine, and is the first in the family to pursue that avenue.

Life never runs smoothly and it's difficult to hear now what must have been doubly so in 1959, when this play was first produced. It feels raw and new, despite the more than 50 years that has passed since it was written. See this play for what it says about our country then and what it says about us now. You will be thinking about it for a long time afterward. Pressley, Dirden, and Dickinson make an amazing trio.

This play runs in Red Bank, New Jersey, until October 8 so get thee to www.tworivertheater.org or you'll miss out on a mordant commentary on our own times.