

A play that exposes slavery, racism, torture, blackface, whiteface, redface -in your face- is just brilliant

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An Octoroon.

Currently playing at the LA Fountain Theatre until September 19

A blog-View by Alejandra Enciso-Dardashti



Mara Klein and Hazel Lozano. Photo by Jenny Graham

It is always tricky when doing a play within a play. Obie award-winning *An Octoroon*, by MacArthur Foundation "Genius Grant" recipient Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, is based on the 1859 play *The Octoroon* by Dion Boucicault. This marks the LA premiere and inauguration of the new outdoor stage at The Fountain Theatre.

I have to admit, I had no idea what "Octoroon" meant. There is no need to google it before seeing the play being that it will get explained onstage. This "American" thing of labeling everything for division and placement sake...is something that really bothers me. However, the performance eased my annoyance. You see, more than a play within a play, I consider Jacob-Jenkins's piece to be a live deconstruction (and analysis) of Boucicault's. A really intelligent and raw one.

I would say that this is not for the weak but at the same time, I consider everyone, weak or not, racist or not, ignorant or not, should see *An Octoroon*. Set in 1859 U.S., alternating language (and attitude) between that time, and now. Branden, (referred to as part of the "Golden Age of American Playwriting" in a [LA Times essay by Charles McNulty](#)) grabs audiences' emotions/reactions from the first minute and takes them for an over two-hour ride. The free-fall kind where gravity has fun and the stomach turns. Once things stop and you think everything is over, a surprise loop or added fall comes.



Vanessa Claire Stewart and Matthew Hancock. Photo by Jenny Graham

A play that exposes slavery, racism, torture, blackface, whiteface, reface -in your face- is just brilliant. The satire is so blunt that it goes bullet by bullet exhibiting what is, and always has been terribly wrong. And yet, at times it is funny. That becomes confusing and then it turns uncomfortable. Some can handle and continue, some cannot and just decide to leave. No need to explain which type of audience member leaves and which stays.

Executed with a majestic cast. Matthew Hancock as the puzzled Black playwright interacting with the audience and portraying two white characters, good and bad, -at the same time- was a thrill to watch, balancing histrionic and physical. Brava!

Hazel Lozano brings so much to the performance in like a million layers. From diction to dance, to multi-facet, she can do it all!

Rob Nagle as Boucicault from an Irish accent to a Native American and a slave auctioneer, proves to audiences a vast experience and strong acting abilities.

Leea Ayers, Kacie Rogers, and Pam Trotter as the three modern slave women make the icing with the cherry on top. Portraying such a delicate and cruel setting in this sarcastic and funny way is just such a brain twister. Mara Klein as the octoroon and Vanessa Claire Stewart as the love-hungry heiress Dora, round out this amazing cast.



Kacie Rogers, Pam Trotter, Hazel Lozano and Leea Ayers. Photo by Jenny Graham

I am not one to share spoilers or recount a show. For that, audiences just have to go and see for themselves. What I will share, is that one of the moments staged, dated back to slavery times, resembles sadly, far too well a 2020 real-life event. Reminding us, how things have not really changed that much. More than storytelling, theatre is also a way to educate, ask questions, meditate, and evoke feelings. Sometimes, some of this or all of the above can cause discomfort. And that is totally OK and very necessary right now. Companies like Fountain Theatre are raising the stakes and staging these types of content that might not be received warmly by many and that is totally OK too.

If you are in the Los Angeles and/or surrounding areas, support and treat yourself.

An Octoroon is directed by Judith Moreland, The Fountain Theatre creative team includes scenic designer Frederica Nascimento, lighting designer Derrick McDaniel, sound designer Marc Antonio Pritchett, video designer Nicholas E. Santiago, costume designer Naila Aladdin Sanders; prop master Michael Allen Angel; choreographer Annie Yee; fight director Jen Albert; and dramaturg Dr. Daphnie Sicré. The production stage manager is Deena Tovar, assistant stage manager is Quinn O'Connor, and production manager for the Fountain's

outdoor stage is Shawna Vorigen. Stephen Sachs and Simon Levy co-produce for the Fountain Theatre, and the associate producer is James Bennett. Barbara Herman and Susan Stockel are executive producers.

Running until through Sept.19, with performances on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays at 7 p.m., Tickets range from \$25–\$45; Pay-What-You-Want seating is available every Monday night in addition to regular seating (subject to availability).

For reservations and information, call (323) 663-1525 or go to www.FountainTheatre.com.

Tip: Arrive with plenty of time to find street parking or across the street for five dollars, flat rate. Bring warm clothes because it gets chilly as the evening progresses.



Hazel Lozano and Rob Nagle. Photo by Jenny Graham