

Octoroon: A Timely Look at Race Relations

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by Valerie Summers

After a year and a half, the Fountain Theater has resurfaced with a beautiful outdoor, socially distanced comfortable seating arrangement in a venue following strict guidelines for a safe theater experience. The opening show, *An Octoroon*, offers a timely look at racial prejudice where several of the actors switch races with the help of a bit of makeup. This was an intentional use of makeup critiquing the casting of White actors with make up to play Black and Red parts in bygone days because Black actors were not allowed onstage. The word Octoroon describes people who have a very small quantity of Black blood but who appear to be White as is the case with one of the actors who falls in love with a White man. In this Obie award-winning play based on a 1859 play by Dion Boucicault, playwright Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins has created a theatrical experience which hearkens back to the days of slavery while including a good bit of humor. The show evolved from a 19th century melodrama that Jacobs-Jenkins has transformed into a current look at our racial politics which has come to the forefront during the past year. The antebellum South and 21st century cultural politics collide as the audience is intentionally made to feel uncomfortable. However, in doing so, a step forward is created in changing our ways regarding attitudes toward race.

Playing through September 19

Fountain Theater

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