

Off-Broadway

A delicious mix of comedy and drama



By Ernece B. Kelly
Drama Critic

“Charlie’s Waiting”

Crisply directed by Ludovica Villar-Hausser and featuring Tony nominee Xanthe Elbrick as Louise, “Charlie’s Waiting” is a delicious mix of comedy and suspenseful drama.

Running only 70 minutes (no intermission) and consisting of only one set, audiences are dropped into the home of Louise and Kelly (Stephanie Heitman), her female partner on the eve of their wedding. Louise is busy preparing decorations and tying up numerous loose ends when a stranger, Annie (played with a perfect balance of awkwardness and humor by Amy Scanlon) arrives unexpectedly.

Their meeting is an awkward mix of talk and silences—playwright Melisa Annie gets this just right—since it’s the absent Kelly who is Annie’s friend. Eventually, audiences



Actors Stephanie Heitman (Kelly) and Xanthe Elbrick (Louise) (Photo: John Quilty)

learn the reason for Annie’s visit, and it’s a shocker!

When Kelly does come home—she’s been out taking care of goats on a neighboring site—we learn more about her and her past relationships. Unfortunately, her role is un-

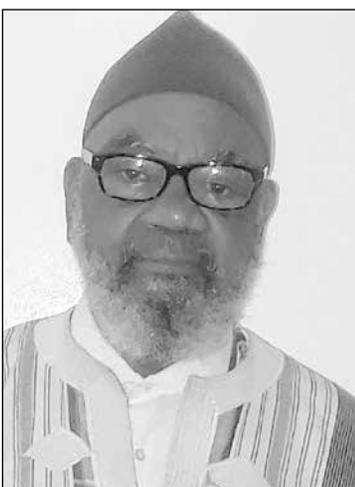
derwritten, riddled with unmotivated behaviors.

Despite this critical shortcoming, “Charlie’s Waiting” is enhanced by Meganne George’s breathtaking black-and-white set design, the clever sound effects of Caroline Kittredge Faustine,

and the mood enhancing lighting of Miriam Nilofa Crowe.

Produced by Parity Productions which says it’s the only NYC organization hosting a free data base of women, trans and gender nonconforming theatre professionals, “Charlie’s

Waiting” appears to have virtually an all-female production staff. However, this reviewer noted no African-Americans/Latinas in the playbill. “Charlie’s Waiting” is at *TheaterLab, West on 36th Street, Manhattan, running thru April 20th.*



By Yusef Salaam
Contributing Scribe

A series of play readings

The Harlem-based Dwyer Cultural Center presents the Race Aid Project, a series of readings of plays by award-winning Dramatist J. E. Franklin the last Sunday of every month.

The recent offering, “Nana Bessie’s Big Question,” explored an inquiry that has perplexed African Americans and

other people of color for millenniums. The drama examined the psycho-spiritual causes and consequences of white superiority behavior regarding African peoples. The evening started with a poem, “Child Shall Lead” read by Alicia Rozier. Another poem, “Master Race,” was performed by Four Little Girls, Nyae Lewis, Sakkara Lewis, Alicia Lola Rozier, and Sade Simone Solomon-Lowery. Eminent photographer Ed Sherman bid a prized photo during a silent auction.

Directed by Jeannine Foster-McKelvia, “Nana Bessie’s Big Question” featured illustrious Vinie Burrows as Nana Bessie and talented Malika Nzinga as Addie, her great-great granddaughter. Bessie, serious as Queen Mother Moore about race, resides in a nursing home and cherishes Addie’s company. “You the only visitor

I got,” she said, insisting that she return.

Addie is shocked when Nana posted a question to her, “Why do they hate us?” Addie offers a few glib answers, hoping to quash Nana Bessie’s inquisitiveness, but she would’ve done better trying to make it rain upward. Granny had studied the matter for decades, read mountains of books, and completed graduate field work cleaning boss ladies’ homes but just couldn’t figure, “Why them White folks hate us? We ain’t done nothin’ to ‘em!”

Addie leaves the visit astounded by Nana’s profound knowledge, penetrative analyses, and her inability to address Nana’s query. Each visit becomes a dynamic encounter mining for answers, untangling the contradictions and hypocrisies of Caucasian Supremacy.

Some of granny’s raw logic

caused the audience to roar with laughter. She posits that if whites view Black folks to be so despicable to the point they don’t want to be around them, then why do they have “cotises (sex) with us?” She argues, too, that their abhorrence can’t be based on dark skin color because they treat the palest African American like vomit, too. Nana and Addie sum that although European Americans declare that they reject Africans because they lack industriousness, they will mistreat a Black lawyer like he’s an addict smoking a crack pipe in a Harlem alley.

Burrows’s gift for capturing the Ebonics shades of Franklin’s southern characters breathed oxygen into them, clothed them in flesh and bones. Nzinga interpreted Addie flawlessly opposite Nana. She’s more formally educated,

but respects grandma’s organic learning although she has to explain words from granny’s vocabulary to us. She pictured Addie’s frustration with Nana Bessie in a paced, sometimes comical patience manner.

After the play conclusion, Michelle Alexander, a physician, invited the audience to answer questions, which initiated spirited responses about racism, race, religion, and the God complex of the Caucasian psyche. There were personal anecdotes about experiences with Aryan Supremacy. One woman’s testimony nearly brought her to tears. The healing energy of the evening was transferred to the dining area where theater-goers enjoyed a scrumptious meal. © *Yusef Salaam is the author of the children’s book, “Elijah Muhammad: Builder of a Nation” usefsalaam47@gmail.com*