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Passing SOLO

Review by Suzanne Birrell. Photos by Kristina Roth.



The Towne Street Theatre Of *Passing SOLO* now in the middle of a short run before heading off to Germany is not to be missed by anyone who struggles with the status quo of current events. *Passing SOLO* is a solo piece inspired by an ensemble piece that was based upon the 1920-s novella " *Passing*" by Nella Larsen. It is theatre at its artistic finest. The production is exquisite in every way. Nancy Cheryll Davis plays two characters: the sturdy down to earth Irene and her childhood friend the bubbly flirtatious Clare. Irene has grown up clinging to her black roots whereas Clare passes as white, married a white man, and thankfully had a white child. With smooth smooth grace, Ms. Davis morphs from one character to another. Her face and posture change. She changes the color of her scarf and her hat and gloves. She moves between sets. Friends and husbands and children are present in conversations. The only reveal - or distraction- as to which character was before us was that both characters played with their hair and costume in the same way.

The production is rich in subtleness. When the character Irene goes out one day just for a lark to a "white restaurant," the table and chairs are pristine white. The music in the back ground is " *How Long has this been going on.*" The final line, rich in ambiguity- is underscored by the tune " *Jealousy.*" The sound effects are tasteful as is the video backdrop. The opening montage of definitions was the

perfect setup for the play.

As Dr. Bryant Keith Alexander pointed out in the Sunday talkback, *Passing SOLO* is a play about whiteness verses blackness. But it could just as easily be about any member of an oppressed group who through accident of genetics is able to pass for the oppressor (Jews for Germans: Native Americans for "Black Irish.") *Passing SOLO* is art at its finest in that it inspires conversation and difficult questions. In the Sunday talkback one gentleman pointed out that race delineated by color was not invented until the 1700's: There really is only one race-the human race. (Before that it was defined by Christian vs heathen) The fact that 100 years ago, someone of African descent might pass themselves off as white in order to take advantage of opportunity and avoid prejudice is something that is unfortunately still be an issue today. Another comment: Why is President Obama labeled as black when he could just as correctly be labeled as white? Conversely, another comment: How is it that a dark skinned black might be accused of acting white? *Passing SOLO* inspires a difficult and still controversial dialogue that should have long ago been resolved.



Passing SOLO is a play rich with texture. The story is more than the relationship between two erstwhile friends. It is a story about the effect of their choices on their individual psyche and how their stories play against each other. The story propels to the final ending where the righteous is suddenly perhaps not so righteous. Nancy Cheryll Davis is a joy to watch. Do not miss this most provocative show.

October 8, 2016 - October 23, 2016
Saturdays at 8:00 p.m. & Sundays at 4:00 p.m.

Tickets

<http://www.townestreetla.org/passingsolo-2016>
\$20 General Admission
\$15 Seniors (62 and over)
\$12 Students with ID



Groups of 6 or more: \$15.00
(must be purchased in advance).

Oct. 23rd: Talkback with Dr. Stephanie Batiste, Associate Professor in the Departments of English & Black Studies, and Director, Hemispheric South/s Research Initiative at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

Posted By Suzanne Birrell on October 19, 2016 11:14 am | [Permalink](#)

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