

Absence makes the heart grow harder

A father leaves prison and attempts to reenter his daughter's life in this sharp, but uneven, play.

By Rod Stafford Hagwood
STAFF WRITER

There's poetry in "Sunset Baby," the drama being put on through Dec. 21 by Primal Forces Production at Andrews Living Arts Studio in Fort Lauderdale's FAT Village.

It's real poetry, sweetly wistful one moment and bracingly bold the next, and not unlike that of Tupac Shakur, an inspiration for "Sunset Baby." Those are the best moments in this work by playwright and two-time NAACP Image Award winner Dominique Morisseau. There is whip-smart dialogue and depth in the three-character play, which appeared off-Broadway last December after a London premiere in 2012. Director Keith Garsson has, for the

most part, laid it out beautifully.

Primal Forces is a new South Florida company whose mission is to present new and classic plays related to America's baby boom. With "Sunset Baby," they have an exploration of not only a generation gap, but the chasm between absent fathers and their daughters, and the legacy of the counter-culture movement on younger generations.

Black Power activist Kenyatta (John Archie) is a long-absent father who intrudes into his daughter Nina's (Makeba Pace) Brooklyn apartment seeking reconciliation after his incarceration as a political prisoner. Kenyatta also wants a cache of letters written by Nina's late mother, a historically and financially valuable legacy. "She's dead, and I'm a mystery to everyone," Nina hisses at her father while recalling how hard relationships have been for her. Later on, she levels him with, "Ain't nothing sentimental about a dead revolution."

Nina's brilliant and brutal boyfriend, Damon (Ethan Henry), has been eking out a living with Nina by following one business plan:

"Sunset Baby"

will run through Dec. 21 at Andrews Living Arts Studio, 23 NW Fifth St., in Fort Lauderdale. Showtimes are 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays, with 2 p.m. matinees Sundays. Tickets cost \$25. To order, call 866-811-4111 or go to PrimalForcesProductions.com.

"sell drugs and rob niggaz." He is a crafty negotiator, as evidenced in a scene with Kenyatta, which features some of the sharpest writing in the whole play. Kenyatta wanted to fight for a better country for his daughter to live in. Nina and Damon, just as disenfranchised as the previous generation, are working as hard as they can to get out of the country. Maybe they'll go to Europe, maybe to London.

What "Sunset Baby" does best is show the no man's land between lofty politics and the painfully personal, when the polemic is pushed from its high moral ground and dragged down to the grit of day-to-day existence.



KEITH GARSSON/COURTESY

Ethan Henry and Makeba Pace star in "Sunset Baby" at Andrews Living Arts Studio in Fort Lauderdale's FAT Village.

But that is much to pack into 90 minutes without an intermission, and about the 60-minute mark, the actors work hard to keep the play from flying off like scattered buckshot. The dialogue loses it hip-hop rhythms, intellectual flow and blunt truthfulness, and resorts to something with more of an academic and professorial tinge,

as Nina and Kenyatta rattle off issue after issue as if they were college students taking a black-studies oral exam.

Then again, there are those moments early on in the play, when Morisseau's language sings a song we've never heard before, right up to the end, which feels unresolved.

BEST BET

"When You're in Love, the Whole World Is Jewish"

Directed by Jason Alexander, of "Seinfeld" fame, this revue is a throwback to G-rated lampoons found on two comedy albums from 1965 and 1966. Producer Billy Riback explains why he and co-producer Danny Gold decided to mount the show: "We were both weaned on classic comedy. And the albums 'You Don't Have To Be Jewish' and 'When You're in Love, the Whole World Is Jewish' were gut-bustingly funny way back then, and because of the timeless nature of the comedy ... they remain just as hilarious today." The jokes, skits and songs are strung together in a plot centered on a young Jewish man who, wanting to marry his gentle girlfriend who knows nothing of his faith, gets a tutorial for her from his rabbi.

When: Through Jan. 11; 7:30 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays; 3 p.m. matinees Wednesdays and Sundays

Where: Mizner Park Cultural Arts Center, 201 Plaza Real, Boca Raton

Cost: \$50-\$70

Contact: 561-910-7727 or WorldIsJewishThePlay.com

— Rod Stafford Hagwood



/BAGELS 'N YUKS PRODUCTIONS/COURTESY

Calendar

THEATER

Professional

Amaluna Cirque du Soleil, through Jan. 24. Sun Life Stadium, 347 Don Shula Drive, Miami Gardens. 877-9-CIRQUE, cirquedusoleil.com/amaluna. 4:30, 8 pm Fri. & Sat.; 1:30, 5:30 pm Sun.; 7:30 pm Tue.-Thu. \$40+.

Bad Jews Comedy, through Dec. 21. GableStage, Biltmore, 1200 Anastasia Ave., Coral Gables. 305-445-1119, gablestage.org. 8 pm Thu.-Sat.; 2, 7 pm Sun. \$40, \$55.

The Book of Mormon Musical comedy, through Sun. at Arsht Center, 1300 Biscayne Blvd., Miami, arshcenter.org. 8 pm Fri., Sat.; 2 pm Sat.; 1 pm Sun. \$39-\$125. Tue.-Dec. 21 (sold out) at Kravis Center, 701 Okeechobee Blvd., West Palm Beach. 561-832-7469, kravis.org. \$45+.

A Chorus Line Musical, through Sun. Crest Theatre, 51 N. Swinton Ave., Delray Beach, 561-243-7922, delraycenterforthearts.org. 8 pm Fri., Sat.; 2 pm Sat., Sun. \$45.

A Christmas Carol 8 pm Tue. Crest Theatre, 51 N. Swinton Ave.,

Delray Beach, delraycenterforthearts.org. \$40.

Edges Drama 8 pm Thu. & Dec. 19. Slow Burn Theatre at West Boca High School, 12811 Glades Road. 866-811-4111, SlowBurnTheatre.org. \$20.

Five Guys Named Moe Musical, through Jan. 18. Broward Stage Door Theatre, 8036 W. Sample Road, Coral Springs. 954-344-7765, stagedoortheatre.com. 8 pm Fri., Sat.; 7 pm Sun.; 2 pm Sat., Sun., Wed. \$38-\$44.

The Gospel According to Jerry Through Sun. New Theatre at South Miami-Dade Cultural Arts Center, 10950 SW 211 St., Cutler Bay. 786-573-5300, new-theatre.org. 8:30 pm Fri., Sat.; 1, 5:30 pm Sun. \$26, \$31.

It's a Wonderful Life Arts Garage Radio Theatre series, 7:30 pm Wed.-Dec. 19. 180 NE First St., Delray Beach. 561-450-6357, artsgarage.org. \$15-\$25.

Mame Musical comedy, through Dec. 28. Wick Theatre, 7901 N. Fed. Hwy., Boca Raton. 561-995-2333, thewick.org. 7:30 pm Thu.-Sat.; 2 pm Wed.-Sun. \$58-\$62.

The Matchmaker Comedy, through Sun. Curtain Call Playhouse at Willow Theatre, Sugar Sand Park, 300 S. Military Trail, Boca Raton. 561-347-3948. 8 pm Fri., Sat.; 2 pm Sat., Sun. \$14-\$23.

Miracle on South Division Street Comedy, through Dec. 28. Actors' Playhouse, 280 Miracle Mile, Coral Gables. 305-444-9293, actorsplayhouse.org.

My Old Lady Drama, through Jan. 4. Palm Beach Dramaworks, 201 Clematis Street, West Palm Beach. 561-514-4042, palmbeachdramaworks.org. 8 pm Wed.-Sat.; 7 pm Sun.; 2 pm Sat., Sun., Wed. \$60.

Old Jews Telling Jokes Comedy revue, through Jan. 4. Broward Stage Door Theatre, 8036 W. Sample Road, Coral Springs. 954-344-7765, stagedoortheatre.com. 8 pm Fri., Sat.; 2 pm Sat., Wed.; 2, 7 pm Sun. \$38-\$44.

Piaf Musical, through Sun. Delray Square Performing Arts, 4809 W. Atlantic Ave. 561-880-0319, delraysquarearts.com. 8 pm Fri., Sat.; 2 pm Sun. \$37.50.

Silver Balls: A Life in Dragee Musical comedy, through Dec. 21.