

September 15, 2010

Off-Broadway Theatre Review

The Revival

now closed

Photo by Jim Ryan



Aidan Sullivan and Trent Dawson

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*Review by Tulis McCall
(15 Sep 2010)*

What a perfect play for these times. Samuel Brett Williams has filled the tiny stage of the Lion Theatre with an enormous tale and is fortunate to have a cracker jack cast that is ready, willing and more than able.

Brother Eli (Trent Dawson) is a local boy from Hot Springs, Arkansas, who made good in the halls of Harvard. When he returns home he picks up the torch passed to him by his father and becomes a Baptist Preacher. He marries a local gal, June (Aiden Sullivan) and life is good. Except when it isn't.

Turns out Brother Eli has a few secrets that he would like to keep secret, just like his daddy did. The secrets are different, but the two men share the same gene when it comes to hiding them.

Eli's problem shows up in the form of a homeless boy, Daniel, who is dumb as a fox. He has been tossed from location to location and it soon becomes apparent why that is. Daniel is seductive and fierce. He is refuge and danger for Brother Eli.

In addition to Daniel there is Brother Trevor (Raymond McAnally) who is a good old church board member with an eye to the future and a hand in the till. Trevor wants their church to hop on to the band wagon of the National Baptist Church umbrella. He wants a mega-church. And in order to do that he has to clean up Eli's intellectual preaching and steer him toward fire and brimstone. Not because it is in any way more true, but because it will put more butts in the pews on Sunday.

And finally, watching it all is June, the happy wife with a bucket load of baggage that she schleps from pillar to post.

Williams writing is economical. The stories here are told with the briefest of brushstrokes because the characters are clear as crystal. Nothing is "explained" that doesn't need explaining. Surprises are steady in their appearance and almost never foreshadowed.

The many stories unfold with the speed of a bolder wandering down a hill. The course is not direct, but it is true.

Underneath the promise of salvation and a direct line to Jesus lies a landscape strewn with the lives of mortals. All messy, all knowing, all encompassing. All refusing to be silenced or smothered by the quilt of guilt.

(Tulis McCall)