



120 Wall Street, 10th Floor, New York, NY 10005 (212) 209-2800

David Rothenberg's Review of Kathleen Clark's "Southern Comforts" at Primary Stages (59 E 59 St) on WBAI

One of the ways that I measure my enjoyment of a play or movie is by the number of people I want to call and urge them to see it. By that standard, Kathleen Clark's two character play, SOUTHERN COMFORTS, at Primary Stages is a five star rave.

To begin with, it deals with a subject totally absent from any recent play or movie, suggesting that people of retirement age might have a serious romantic component to their existence. More startling, a sexuality remains in their being.

I can't recall any recent play or movie with people over 60 having a sexual drive (Unless it is played for an obvious laugh). Ms. Clark's play considers that the days at 65 years are to be as treasured as those of a 25 year old. Most seniors depicted in movies or plays are a Greek chorus, commenting and judging the sexual-romantic pursuits of post-pubescents.

3-dimension older folks are more than invisible. They are unwanted. Television reports, unchallenged, constantly tell us that the 18-49 year olds are the preferred viewers and they create programs for that audience. (Advertisers rationalize that the reason is buying power). Any visit to a Broadway play would reveal that seniors pay out. And all those cruise trips advertise young bodies but when they depart from their Hudson River docks they are bursting with retirees.

Back to SOUTHERN COMFORTS which prompted this outburst, which says something about the play's impact. Amanda, a widow from Tennessee visiting her married daughter in New Jersey meets a townsman, a gruff widower. They don't meet CUTE. They just meet, become acquainted and recognize their similar states. It's just a romantic pas-de-deux (Performed impeccably by Penny Fuller and Larry Keith). Their characters are cluttered with memories and dreams. She, particularly, is outspoken about a desired future that it is important for something of her age as it is for a high school senior searching for a career. Gus is much more hesitant, burdened with years of a barren marriage. His hopes are much below the surface.

Ms. Clark's play has a conventional structure. The suburban setting is recognizable. The two characters dress and sound like much of the audience at the matinee I attended. But underneath, it is startling play, at once enthralling, witty and sadly hopeful.

Judith Ivy has staged the play with authority and the two actors are expert. But most important, Ms. Clark has given a dimension to older people that is almost never revealed in our plays or movies. (One critic, condescendingly, suggested that it might tour retirement communities. Wonder if he would restrict Romeo and Juliet to junior high audiences).