



Big dreams mean big problems in new Morrow play

By Bob Evans

Lewis J. Morrow/KC Melting Pot



Big payoffs come from big dreams and from the dreamer who persevered to bring them to fruition in a new play, “No Such Thing as Midnight Black,” a world premiere play by Kansas City playwright, Lewis J. Morrow that opened Friday, May 25 at the Just Off Broadway Theatre in Kansas City, Missouri.

The play, produced by Harvey Williams’ KC Melting Pot introduced an up and coming local playwright to the KC Metro audiences that features a local cast, vivid characters, articulate dialogue, and a sense that one person’s dream can foster success. In this case, Ellington’s dream plans to relocate 1,000 African Americans to a new housing development and the chance to escape city violence and racial profiling.

On the surface, this sounds like a racially-charged piece full of anger and rage, but rest assured, the focus remains on the end result and better options for those dealing with riots, brutality, profiling, and bushels of red-tape to capture a dream. Yes, Black Lives Matter, and while this piece proclaims that principal, gentle persuasion moves the audience far more than anger.

MeltingPot aims to produce local plays by local African-American playwrights and feature the Black voice, that has been mostly muted in the theater world, from my perspective. MeltingPot offers more opportunity for African-American actors to play diverse parts and grow in their performance skills. "Ain't No Such Thing as Midnight Black" provides the perfect opportunity for that development.

Morrow's play pinpoints a problem in the Black community—safe, new housing outside of inner-city problems. While the solution sounds simple, the main character, Ellington discovers that many of the barriers remain from a century ago. White America does not want to sell large tracts of land for Black development.

As Ellington perseveres toward his dream of helping others in his community, he discovers the problems and prejudices within his own community. Not only does the play address Black Lives Matter, it goes into the idea of the young verses mature. It addresses mixed marriage. It looks at convicted felons and rebuilding their lives. It looks at the issue of women seen as lesser than men. It looks at White privilege. But, the amazing part, "Ain't No Such Thing as Midnight Black," does not present an angry attitude. The play explains the differences that exist within a group and the ways people conflict, even when working toward the same goals.

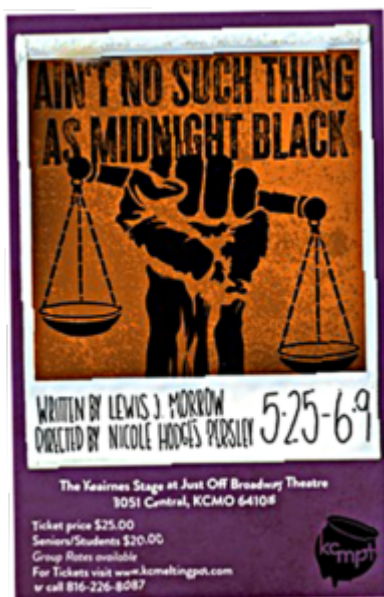
The same in-fighting within Ellington's group exists in all groups, regardless of origin or color. The play speaks an universal truth through carefully crafted characters, pin-

point dialogue, and challenges no matter what the dream or the struggle to attain success.

Ellington wants to make a difference for 1,000 people. His plan begins with a dream. His success comes even when he falls somewhat short of his plan. He demonstrates that the plan and hard work can begin to move mountains.

For the first production of this piece, the play makes a strong statement. Strong casting, carefully written dialogue, good movement, and characters that allow each actor to build their character and give them depth and realism make this play one to watch. As currently produced, the play needs some trimming, maybe 5-6 minutes per act, but still presents a solid piece of craftsmanship by Morrow.

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Directed by Associate Artistic Director Dr. Nicole Hodges Persley, the production features Lewis J. Morrow, Gabriella Hart, Theodore (Priest) Hughes, Jabrelle Herbin, Jerron O'Neal, Robert Coppage, Terraye Watson, Brett Nelson, Lynn King, Anaya Morrow. The writing allows each character to develop and display nuances into their past and present. Each character grows and changes through the piece. That's a sign of good writing and understanding of creating rounded characters.

“Ain’t No Such Thing as Midnight Black” runs through June 9. Tickets may be purchased online through the KC Melting Pot website.

Tags: “Ain’t No Such Thing as Midnight Black”, KC Melting Pot, Lewis J. Morrow, Kansas City Theater, Kansas City Performing Arts, Kansas City Arts & Entertainment