



‘Rise Up’ focuses on pre-Civil Rights skirmishes

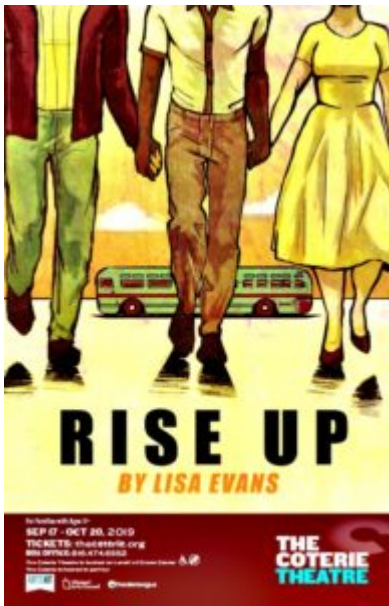


Erin Stricker/The Coterie Theatre

American history classes only tell a small fraction of America’s story, its growth, its people, and the people’s struggles. Plays like “Rise Up” by Lisa Evans record the overlooked stories and provide strong literature for theatre companies to produce.

The Coterie opens its 2020 season with Evans’ account of the Freedom Riders who helped carve a path, leading to the Civil Rights Movement to follow. History classes might mention Freedom Riders, but only in passing. The Coterie shines a light on this painful portion of America’s first steps toward desegregation—specifically in the former slave states of the

Confederacy.



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Artistic director, Jeff Church again found an educational piece, perfectly focused on younger audiences in “Rise Up” and brings it to The Coterie stage. On, Tuesday, Sept. 24, the Coterie hosted over 200 middle school students for a performance of the play with a young cast of four actors who portray several parts each.

Fortunately, most of the Civil Rights Movement from its early days occurred in the time of television, daily newspapers, magazines and under the watchful eye of mass media. Even though the history never received huge coverage in the early days, media did record events for posterity. Research shines light into the shadows and allows such pieces to enlighten the population.

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“Rise Up” takes students into the early days of student activists riding busses into and through the very segregated South. Most of the brutality explored in “Rise Up” occurs in Alabama. The show enlightens viewers about the bus ride, the separate and poor toilet facilities for blacks, the tradition that blacks rode only in the backs of buses, and the fact that blacks and Jews were specifically targeted by the Ku Klux Klan.



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That may seem past history, yet the events of “Rise Up” occurred just over 50 years ago. Freedom Riders began riding buses to test the Supreme Court decision to prevent segregation in interstate bus journeys. The peaceful protest took the riders into hostile and dangerous situations in the South. “Rise Up” offers fresh take on Civil Rights by depicting students who are so moved by historical events, and the story reminds of Florida students now fighting for common

sense gun reform.

“Rise Up” claimed the 2017 Writers Guild Best Play for Young Audiences, and continues The Coterie’s series on Civil Rights. The Coterie will once again offer

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educators pre-show, in-school workshops that will introduce students to the events in the play and help put the story into historical context. Over the past four years, The Coterie’s pre-show, in-school workshops have served over 10,000 area students in more than 500 workshops at over 150 schools, The Coterie said.

The Coterie’s talented cast for “Rise Up” is: Jay Love, Catera Combs, Jordan Luty, and Khrystal L. Coppage. The artistic and production company includes Danielle Renee (production stage manager), Scott Hobart (technical director), Rafael Toribio



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(set designer), Jarrett Bertoncin (lighting designer), Georgianna Londré Buchanan (costume designer), David Kiehl (sound designer), Scott Stackhouse (dialect coach), Rex Hobart (guitar composition), Jordan Luty (keyboard composition), and Chloé Robbins (production assistant).

One of the most inspirational pieces of “Rise Up” at The Coterie is the Q&A session after performances where cast members answers random questions from the audience. The cast portrays real persons and have researched their characters and the events included in “Rise Up.” With no idea of the content or kind of questions,

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this talented cast responds to questions and generates deeper meaning into the Freedom Riders.

“Rise Up” brings history to life and provides a great opportunity to introduce middle school students to live theatre. The theme is difficult and discusses past violence, but remains important for students to understand how knowledge of the past prevents repetition of mistakes. The play continues through Oct. 20 at The Coterie Theatre on the lower level of Crown Center. For dates, times, tickets, prices, group rates, go to [The Coterie Theatre website](#).

Tags: The Coterie Theatre, Crown Center, “Rise Up” review, Kansas City Theatre, Kansas City Performing Arts, Kansas City Arts & Entertainment

