

ENTERTAINMENT

Play To Open At Langston Hughes Center

Reflections: Lorraine Hansberry

by Darryl Lacy

"I was born on the Southside of Chicago. I was born Black and female. I was born in a depression after one world war and came into my adolescence during another. While I was still in my teens the first atom bombs were dropped on human beings at Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and by the time I was twenty-three years old my government and that of the Soviet Union had entered actively into the worst conflict of nerves in human history - the Cold War."



DARRYL LACY

The passage above was taken from a speech Lorraine Hansberry made at a conference on "The Negro Writer and His Roots," March 1, 1959. After reading that passage one could get the impression that Lorraine relished words and knew how to use them well. I imagine this style of clever phrasing was developed while living in a time of insensitive White people and their hostility toward Blacks when it was not fashionable for Blacks to be outspoken - especially a Black woman.

Two weeks after addressing this speech to fellow Black writers, her first play, "A Raisin in the Sun" opened on Broadway. With the success of "Raisin" Lorraine, at age 29, became the youngest playwright, fifth woman, and only Black writer to win the New

York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play of the Year. "Raisin", which is considered by many to be the first real and honest portrayal of Blacks, is a play where a man's ego is second to what is important. Lorraine distinguishes a Black man's pride from ego through the character Walter Lee Younger. Walter Lee's pride was his family's welfare which won out at the end of the play.

Lorraine described her job as a playwright as "an opportunity to treat one character in the most absolute relief, one against the other, so that

everything, sympathy and conflict, is played sharply..."

"To Be Young, Gifted and Black - Lorraine Hansberry in Her Own Words" is more than a collage of speeches, letters and scenes from her plays but a portrait of an individual who celebrated the human spirit. Others believe it to be a prophetic chapter in the history of a people and an age.

"The Domestic" is a scene about a Black woman being harassed by White boys on the street making sly remarks like "hundred dollar misunderstanding." At the end of the scene the angry woman remarks, "Baby you could be Jesus in drag but if you're Black, they're sure you're selling!"

"The Harlem Church" takes place at the funeral of a young Black boy. An old lady, after viewing his body asks if the cops had shot him. When someone answers yes she replies, "I guess it don't make no difference about going to school no more."

Lorraine always asked questions about why conditions had to be the way they were, why people just accepted these conditions. Even as a child she was always one to wonder "why" and "how" about things: "Why was it important to take a small step, a teeny step, or the most desired of all - one giant step? A giant step to where?"

The hopes and expectations she held were bigger than life.

Lorraine died of cancer at the age of 34 when her second play, "The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window" was running on Broadway. At that time Martin Luther King remarked: "Her commitment of spirit...her creative ability and her profound grasp of the deep social issues confronting the world today will remain an inspiration to generations yet unborn."

On Saturday November 17th, the Langston Hughes Institute, 25 High Street, will present "To Be Young, Gifted and Black" by Lorraine Hansberry in two acts as directed by Darryl Lacy. The performance begins at 8 p.m. Admission is \$2.50.

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