

LAWEEKLY

NEW REVIEW GO TREE

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Photo by Ed Krieger

An elderly Black woman, Jessalyn Price (Sloan Robinson) suffers from dementia in an upstairs bedroom in Chicago's Southside, circa 2000, where she lives with her caretaker son, Leo (Chuma Gault). The story of Jessalyn's past, and of her impassioned, forbidden love, emerges through her too-poetical ramblings, in Julie H?bert's otherwise riveting family drama. The saga comes into clear focus, however, with the help of a Caucasian interloper, Didi Mercantel (Jacqueline Wright) - a single, emotionally brittle brianiac from Louisiana who "suffers" from some gender ambiguity, and who claims to be the daughter of the man, just deceased, who once loved and abandoned the woman upstairs. A box of letters hidden in a safe deposit box contains evidence of a history that's been convoluted by rumors and folklore. Just when you thought August: Osage County had put the family drama to rest for a while, here comes a new play that doesn't ride on the macabre or the Gothic; rather, it's propelled by a kind of anthropological dig of detritus and hand-written missives from decades past, revealing the tugs of history, society and circumstance on a white Southern youth and his Black girlfriend, both from Louisiana, trying to build a life together in the land of the free. Leo's daughter, J.J. (Tessa Thompson) chastises Didi that she has no right to seek consolation for her father's death by bursting in their door. "You're not family," J.J. declares. Whether that declaration is a truth, a truism, or a cruel editorial opinion lies at the heart of what this play says about our relations to each other in a nation of interlopers. Jessica Kubzansky's staging brings the characters' wry intelligence to the fore. [Inside] the Ford, 2580 Cahuenga Blvd. East, Hollywood; Wed.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 & 7 p.m.; thru Dec. 13. (323) 461-3673 or <http://FordTheatres.org>. An Ensemble Studio Theatre-L.A. production. (Steven Leigh Morris)