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THEATER REVIEW

Driving home a weighty message

By David C. Nichols , Special to The Times

Acting and writing fuel 'Stage Directions,' an effective dramedy about stereotyping.

More than one preconception is upended in "Stage Directions," the second production of the "Hot Properties" series at Inside the Ford. L. Trey Wilson's absorbing dramedy addresses the heart of stereotyping with real wit and resolute craft.

"Stage Directions" operates from a double-sided premise, recalling Jean Anouilh. It begins in John H. Binkley's stylized park setting, where two homies banter and spar against an odd undercurrent. Their ambiguous confab halts at its most intimate moment. Up come the house lights and the run-through we have been watching becomes a debate between theater practitioners.

The sticking point is a same-sex kiss between straight actor Rod (Marc Ewing) and gay colleague Gary (Wilson). Their simmering tension spills over onto director Jay (William Christian) and playwright Terry (Kareem Ferguson). An acerbic study of African American homophobia evolves, without villains or innocents. There are only confrontations and counteraccusations; their impact is revealed in an inspired, upbeat ending.

Wilson's architecture has its discrepancies. Expository details sometimes feel perfunctory, and the mechanics of exits/entrances are a bit too clever. Yet, given Wilson's grasp of milieu and character, mastery of wicked retorts and unswerving integrity, it is hard to bemoan post-larval quirks.

Dan Bonnell's direction keeps things taut, and the terrific cast trumps assumptions throughout. Wilson's vivid militant dovetails superbly with Ferguson's understated apologist, and Ewing, recalling the emerging Laurence Fishburne, is a find. The ever-reliable Christian brings even more nuances to his harried mediator than the script does, and Chuma Hunter Gault's late-inning addition proves the play's point without ego. Their unified commitment to deeper significance distinguishes "Stage Directions." Viewers who doubt that its arresting message applies to them are precisely the people in most need of hearing it.

'Stage Directions'

Where: [Inside the Ford](#), 2580 Cahuenga Blvd. E., Hollywood

When: Thursdays to Saturdays, 8 p.m.; Sundays, 3 p.m.

Ends: Feb. 28

Price: \$15-\$20

Contact: (323) 461-3673

Running time: 1 hour, 50 minutes