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Gentrifusion

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[Rachel Merrill Moss](#) · January 28, 2011

To many, May 1st each year lives in infamy as the one sweaty, frenzied day of moving that signifies a fresh start. But vacating is no such thing for so many across the city: forced moving and displacement are the harsh realities of gentrification. The Red Fern Theatre Company has gathered six playwrights to showcase pieces delving into the g-word, presented as *Gentrifusion: an installation of new work*, now playing at LABA Theatre.

With six playwrights and three directors at the helm, and less installation than installments on a theme, *Gentrifusion* explores the ongoing gentrification throughout New York's boroughs. Though disparate in content, dialogue, and character, the plays appropriately all touch on overlapping issues of displacement and disavowal versus ownership of the past.

Much like the boroughs, each of the six pieces has its own rhythm and flavor. The evening covers Brooklyn,



Pictured: Nathan Hinton and Sheldon Best in a scene from *Gentrifusion* (photo © Jordan Popalis)

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the Bronx, Harlem, the Lower East Side, and the West Village, all offering a sampling of the types of previous tenants who occupied the areas but have now been forced out. Ranging from the turn of the last century to the recent turn of the calendar, *Gentrifusion* briefly delivers six pinpricks of this oft-pejorative process. With an urbanized, colloquial take on *Our Town*, Jon Kern presents a Brooklyn neighborhood on the cusp of inevitable change, for better and for worse, in *Ours Is the Future. Ours Is the Past*. Bedroom-mates Sam and Jakob still can't make ends meet in Carla Ching's *First of the Month*. Transvestite Chantelle reminds privileged gay man Stephan of the struggle for acceptance and autonomy their neighborhood and orientation dealt with for so many years in Joshua Conkel's *Robert Mapplethorpe Doesn't Live Here Anymore*. Michael John Garcés explores the physical presence of history within each building's walls in his supernatural piece, *inhabited*. A single white female and her baby are held up at gunpoint, though it is her motives that are questioned in Janine Nabers's *(2) 11*. And rounding out the evening, Crystal Skillman deftly delivers two brothers' struggle to justify selling their familial home in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, in *Crawl*.

While displaying the disparaging truth that such "progress" does not come without suffering and sacrifice, the most compelling pieces of the evening are accompanied by hope. Conkel's *Robert Mapplethorpe* makes a case for the need for compassion when it comes to a shared neighborhood or personal history, that so often gets swept aside in the fray of the move to the top or an area "clean-up." Garcés's *inhabited* displays the inescapability of the past when it comes to the spaces we occupy in the city, and the beauty of embracing that now-shared history.

But the drearier side of gentrification that emerges from this composite indeed merits discussion as well. This dark side is one in which grown men must take roommates to be able to afford rent and hate crimes are trivialized. Where people who have lived in their neighborhood homes for an entire lifetime have nothing more tangible to hold on to than their emotional roots when priced out.

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A life-size, decomposing brick walk-up exterior creates the backdrop for all the pieces. Prior to curtain, during intermission, and between the pieces, projections of quintessentially New York streets, people, and subway scenes play upon the face of the decrepit building. Scenic designer Katherine Akiko Day has smartly captured the very true sense of the all-seeing, all-knowing buildings throughout the city, which have sat idly by as the neighborhood changes around them. In a rather lovely way, Day has given this one façade a means to talk.

The three directors have wisely chosen a talented group for their vignettes. Standouts include Andre St. Clair Thompson as an incredibly charming tranny in the West Village and Nathan Hinton as an older brother ready to sever his Brooklyn roots.

Often times, living in New York is made possible by focusing on the microcosm of the life we've carved out for ourselves, so as not to be overwhelmed by her powerful diversity and boisterous vibrance. *Gentrifusion* is a proper reminder to be mindful of those who have come before, those who have sacrificed everything to stay here, and those who are as painfully passionate about the neighborhood and city (and that special bodega) as you are.

Opened: January 29, 2011

Closes: February 13, 2011

Show Info

Synopsis: A series of short plays searching for the truth behind the gentrification of New York, presented by Red Fern Theatre Company.

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Venue: [LABA Theatre at the 14th Street Y](#)

Running Time: 1 hour, 50 minutes; 1 intermission

Prices: \$25.00

Ticketing Info

Box Office/Info: 212-352-3101

Tickets On Sale Thru: February 13, 2011

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Performance Schedule:

Thu at 8:00pm

Fri at 8:00pm

Sat at 8:00pm

Sun at 3:00pm

also Feb 7 at 7pm

except Feb 6 at 2pm

Artists Involved

Cast: Sheldon Best, Rajesh Bose, Tim Cain, Molly Carden, Wayne T. Carr, Salvador Chevez, Gilbert Cruz, Andrea Day, Nathan Hinton, Devin Norik, Eugene Oh, Gio Perez, Casey Robinson, Michael Schantz, Andre St. Clair Thompson, Federico Trigo, Megan Tusing, Tai Verley, Tiffany Villarin

Author: Carla Ching, Joshua Conkel, Michael John Garcés, Jon Kern, Janine Nabers, Crystal Skillman

Director: John Giampietro, Colette Robert, Moritz von Stuelpnagel

Lighting: Marie Yokoyama

Sound: Colin J. Whitely

Producer: Red Fern Theatre Company

Production Stage Manager: Michal V. Mendelson

Sets & Costumes: Katherine Akiko Day

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