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Still Glorious Theater: *Between Riverside and Crazy* Opens Again at 4th Wall

MARGARET DOWNING | MAY 14, 2022 | 7:16AM



Photo by Gabriella Nissen Bryon Jacquet, Briana Resa and Juan Sebastián Cruz in 4th Wall's production of *Between Riverside and Crazy*.

As a shrill police siren alerts the audience that the play is starting, *Between Riverside and Crazy* opens to a kitchen table scene: former NYPD office Walter "Pops" Washington is eating his breakfast accompanied by healthy servings of whiskey.

Byron Jacquet in a command performance as Pops, is king of all he surveys even if his royal attire is a

ratty bathrobe, his apartment has an equally worn look to it and his throne is a wheelchair. In short order we're introduced to former felon and ex-addict Oswaldo (Juan Sebastián Cruz), his son Junior's impossibly dim girlfriend Lulu (Briana Resa) and his only child Junior (Joseph "Joe P." Palmore) who himself has spent time upstate and may be continuing the criminal enterprises that got him there.

All live with Pops for free, an arrangement that does not come without cost as Pops can swing from an amused and amusing benevolent being to a strident and demanding oligarch in a moment. In this Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Stephen Adly Guirgis, every character is nuanced, there is humor amid the bleakness and pay attention or you'll miss something important.

This is the same 4th Wall Theatre Co. impressive production mounted in 2020 that was cut short by the arrival of COVID-19. Director Kim Tobin-Lehl who also plays the part of Lt. Audrey O'Connor, Pops' former partner, says she was happily surprised that everyone in the original cast was eager to sign on for another go two years later.

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Pops has been nursing a grudge and a lawsuit for eight years now. He was shot six times by a white cop – once for each letter in the "N" word shouted at him in the incident he notes – and he wants the city to pay up. Everyone – his son, the city, his former partner – wants him to settle but he's got his eye on a big payday and a public acknowledgement that he was done a significant wrong. So while bills mount and the landlord figures out a way to evict him from his Riverside rent-controlled apartment, Pops has hunkered down and won't be moved.

Pops isn't the only one holding grudges. His son Junior has a set of his own – among them that his father wouldn't settle his lawsuit even when the money would have paid for nursing care for Pops' late wife in her last days. It's clear the relationship between father and son is badly damaged with seething disappointment on both sides.

Palmore, so good as a serial killer **[in 4th Wall's 2018 production of Guirgis's *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train*](#)**, ably inhabits this role as well. Junior, periodically urged by his father to "grow up" is as stuck in his resentments and life as his father is. He has an ex-wife who he avoids, a girlfriend who may or may not be pregnant and a desire to get away from it all and be alone if only for a weekend trip to Baltimore.

Pops' old partner and her fiance, Lt. Dave Caro (Philip Lehl) drop by one night. What starts out as a nice dinner filled with war stories devolves afterward as Dave has too much to drink and the real

reason for the couple's visit becomes clear – they want him to stop all this and settle his lawsuit. It's embarrassing to the city. Lehl plays a typical slimy mid-level manager looking for a way up the food chain at headquarters, but when he really hits his stride is in Act II when with increasing doses of desperation, he unloads on Pops in terms both cajoling and threatening. Pops doesn't trust him. Nor should he.

Cruz, as ex-addict Waldo, seems an amiable goof, grateful to Pops who he's adopted as a father figure because his relationship with his own father is toxic. His sudden turn of character after an attempt at reconciliation with his father fails, allows Cruz to show the range in his acting ability and shocks us at the same time.

And then there's the Church Lady, sent in to bring Pops back to his faith and religion. What she (Pamela Vogel in a wild role) brings him to is something else entirely and not to be missed.

Above all there is Pops, played in a masterful, riveting performance by Jacquet. He pulls us forward throughout the play, his wry humor and generosity of spirit surfacing amid his bouts of bitterness and rage. He is a man who feels betrayed and abandoned by the city he served for 30 years.

Cast members aren't the only returnees from the 2020 production. Set Designer Ryan McGettigan, Lighting designer Christina Giannelli and Sound Designer Robert Leslie Meek are all back hitting their marks, constructing so well the world inhabited by Pops and his family. The costumes by Cherie Acosta are spot on as well.

Throughout the play Guirgis has assembled a group of deeply flawed individuals, most of whom as he convincingly sets forth deserve a second chance. Redemption, he makes clear, comes through connection with other people and a willingness to let go of past hurts and forge new paths – aided by a healthy dose of grace that no one can earn, but only receive. There is no one so far gone that they cannot be redeemed.

Except, maybe not Dave and Audrey.

Performances continue through June 4 at 7:30 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays and 3 p.m. Sundays at Spring Street Studios, 1824 Spring Street. For more information, call 832-767-4991 or visit 4thwalltheatreco.com. \$17-\$53 (Pay-What-You-Can on Monday, May 30).