

June 6 - 21, 2008

Split Second

Reviewed June 7 by [Brad Hathaway](#)

Running time 1:50 - one intermission
A taut police drama from the policeman's perspective

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Crime dramas aren't anything new. There are plenty of plays that give the victim's view. There are almost as many others that give the perpetrator's view. Then there are those that concentrate on the judicial system's operation. Some even give the policeman's view, but often these just touch on the policeman through such clichés as honorable-but-overworked public servant or seen-it-all cynic. Here's one that takes a refreshingly complicated but highly focused look at the policeman under pressure to put public duty above personal, human nature. If a policeman fails to live up to expected standards for one "split second" under great pressure, and gives in to anger and frustration that would be natural for anyone not wearing a badge, should he be held to account by either "the system" or, for that matter, by himself? This production lays these questions out for examination without distracting embellishments, which is exactly what the playwright has attempted to do with his script. It is a good match of performance and material for a satisfyingly serious evening of community theater.



Storyline: A black policeman gives in to anger and frustration for one brief moment when his prisoner taunts and insults him unmercifully. Pulling the trigger of the gun he holds on his handcuffed captive, he ends his prisoner's life and changes his own. In succeeding scenes he tells his story (or various versions thereof) to his supervisor, his partner, his wife and finally his father - a former cop himself. Each has a different reaction.

Written in 1984, this is the most frequently performed of the half dozen plays by Dennis McIntyre who had become recognized as the creator of solid, well constructed plays before his death of cancer at age 47. It is a highly focused piece consisting of single scenes for each of the major aspects of the story. There's the scene of the incident itself (with Jackson Dismukes giving a strong performance as the despicably racist and obnoxious criminal) followed by individual scenes of the reactions of the important people in the policeman's life. That policeman is played with an honest, open feel by Christopher C. Holbert.

The two most important people in the policeman's world, his wife and his father, are given very strong performances by Amy Miharuru Hard and Donnell Boykin. Hard is at her best when she reaches the peak of fear that her husband may well go to prison if he tells the truth about what he has done. Her pain is multiplied by her panic in a very believable outburst. Boykin gives an uncompromising performance as the father who expects from his son adherence to a set of standards he believes he maintained during his own career as one of the few blacks to serve on the police force in his native Pittsburgh. He's thoroughly supportive of his son at first, but the inconsistencies in the story begin to bother him and he can't abide what he finally comes to believe. Boykin has a distracting habit of overdoing conversational gestures, but he maintains a clarity of voice and a solid control of his characterization that is quite satisfying.

Supporting performances are well controlled as well. In addition to Dismukes' insufferable criminal, Franklin Walker's fatigued police captain who has heard it all and Jermaine Shorts' loyal partner are handled with skill in a staging by Ed Bishop which avoids any distractions from the central story and moves along at a measured pace, accelerating when emotions flare but not moving too quickly past those moments of heat. It should be noted that Kathy Nay will take on the role of the policeman's wife for the weekend of June 13 - 14 before Hard returns for the final week of the run.

Written by Dennis McIntyre. Directed by Ed Bishop. Design: Ed Bishop and Donald Neal (set) Farrell Hartigan (costumes) Donald Neal (properties) Chris Hardy and Alice Lee (lights) Keith Bell (sound) Douglas Olmsted (photography) Carolyn Lightfoot (stage manager). Cast: Donnell Boykin, Jackson Dismukes, Amy Miharuru Hard or Kathy Nay, Christopher C. Holbert, Jermaine Shorts, Franklin Walker.