

April 8 - 23, 2005

Fences

Reviewed April 9

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Running time 2:25 - one intermission

General admission seating

Some solid performances in a richly developed play

The Potomac Region has both of August Wilson's Pulitzer Prize-winning plays playing at the same time. While Arena Stage is presenting *The Piano Lesson* in DC, this quality community theater company tackles this more realistic but no less emotional play about the pain of failing to live up to your own self-expectations. Wilson is the playwright attempting to survey the African American experience decade by decade throughout the twentieth century. This is the one covering the 1950s, a time when the hopes and dreams which would stimulate the civil rights movement were crystallizing but had yet to motivate mobilization.



Storyline: A former Negro Baseball league athlete, who had dreamt of stardom but ended up as a garbage collector, wants to keep his son from a similar disillusioning fate. At the same time, he has to cope with the consequences of his own weaknesses and their impact on his marriage and on the rest of his family.

The cast of newcomers to this company includes Michael Sainte-Andress in the central role of the disillusioned husband and father unable to live up to his own view of the role of a man. He gets the pain of this proud man right, while Patricia Williams as his wife helps build a picture of their routine home life. When the two have to run the emotional level up to great heights for the scene where he is forced to confess infidelity because of his mistress' pregnancy, they fall a bit short of the searing fervor the scene deserves.

Paul Andrew Morton is very good indeed as the friend and colleague of the father on the garbage route. There is a sense of chemistry between Sainte-Andress and Morton that feels right for two men who have spent hours hauling trash and unwound together over the single bottle of gin they allow themselves on Friday nights. Also impressive is Rashard Harrison in the role of a casualty of World War II.

Director Ed Bishop's no-nonsense staging serves the text well as he keeps the focus on the words in Wilson's script with few distractions. Al Myska's fight choreography didn't quite work at the performance we reviewed during the first weekend of this three-weekend run. Perhaps it will work better later in the run, but it seemed to suffer from some of the same reticence that hurt the confession scene mentioned above.

Written by August Wilson. Directed by Ed Bishop. Fight choreography by Al Myska. Design: Joe Schubert (set) Eleni Aldridge (costumes) Judy Kee (properties) Ken and Patti Crowley (lights) Keith Bell (sound) Doug Olmsted (photography) Carlyn Lightfoot (stage manager). Cast: Rashard Harrison, DeLon Howell, Paul Andrew Morton, Nailah Newsom or Gabrielle Powell, Rick Peete, Michael Sainte-Andress, Patricia Williams.