



BWW Reviews: Mustard Seed Theatre's Production of CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE OF JOY

[Back to the Article](#)

by Chris Gibson



Playwright [Lynn Nottage](#)'s *Crumbs From the Table of Joy*, which is set in the 1950's, initially gives us more than enough plot for one play, presenting us with a grief-stricken widower who decides to pack up his two teenage daughters and haul them off to New York. But, Nottage isn't content to play out this scenario on its own, and opts to pile on contrivance upon contrivance in an attempt to create a sort of surreal slice of life comedy-drama. When it works, it's actually quite magical in execution, but when it doesn't, it just seems to be meandering aimlessly toward another predictably unpredictable twist that only serves to further muddy the heart of the story. Thankfully, Mustard Seed Theatre has put together an

engaging production of this convoluted work that features solid acting and direction.

Godfrey Crump, rechristened Godfrey Goodness for his servitude and devotion to the evangelical teachings of one Father Divine, moves his two daughters north, uprooting them from their rural surroundings in Florida to the decidedly more urban hub of Brooklyn, New York, after his wife dies. This play touches on the changes that occur to their family dynamic after Godfrey's free-spirited (and communist) sister-in-law Lily moves in, and after Godfrey suddenly falls in love with, and impulsively marries, a German immigrant named Gerte. At the center of these machinations are the emotions and feelings of Ernestine, who narrates the action, and Ermina Crump. There appears to be nothing constant in their young lives but change, and yet they somehow manage to muddle through.

Chauncey Thomas does strong work as Godfrey, and he deftly runs the emotional



gamut as we're witness to him plumbing the depths of his despair, as well as a few isolated moments of unbridled excitement and joy. Patrese McClain brings a vivacious quality to her role as Lily, who's openly sexual, and none too shy about expressing her left wing politics. Her energetic work adds a real spark to the proceedings. Jill Ritter-Lindberg is also quite good as Gerte Schulte, and she puts up a brave front, especially when you consider the fact that she has her own emotional baggage to deal with, while trying to somehow keep this family together. Alexis White delivers a credible performance as Ernestine, while her sister, Tyler White, draws considerable attention with her well-timed wisecracks and feisty demeanor.

Linda Kennedy's sensitive direction is a good match for this material, and any shortcomings that are evident are really more a product of Nottage's crazy quilt script, which attempts to weave far too many disparate elements together to fully satisfy. Kennedy is greatly aided by Brian Purlee's nicely constructed and designed set, JC Krajicek's period costumes, and Bess Moynihan's successful lighting scheme.

Mustard Seed Theatre's production of *Crumbs From the Table of Joy* continues through September 12, 2010 at the Fontbonne University Fine Arts Theatre.



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