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AMS 214

Dr. Sullivan

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This is OUR Youth, Too

Kenneth Lonergan's *This Is Our Youth* is one of the most genuine and relevant plays I have seen in a very long time. I can honestly say that it spoke to me on a deep level. The portrayal of the characters by Michael Cera and Kieran Culkin were so natural and relatable. I really believed that they were Dennis and Warren, rather than actors simply portraying the part. Perhaps it is because I'm finding myself in this limbo of life as well that I find it so relevant. It is scary, actually, how well Lonergan was able to capture that period in a young adult's life. The in-between of being stuck a kid and trying desperately to be seen and respected as an adult. In addition to the acting, the staging and lighting were simply brilliant; I actually believed I was in a New York City apartment and I saw the days change as the scenes changed. It was wonderfully realistic. Director Anna Shapiro fantastically guided these actors into developing their own characters in order to put on one of the greatest productions I've seen.

The stage direction was phenomenal. None of the characters could sit still. Their constant motion highlighted their impatience and desire to make something of themselves on the stage. Warren's inability to pick one spot to sit or to simply sit around doing nothing guided the audience into realizing that he's terrified; he has no idea where his life is headed, he has no place to live, and he has nobody to fall back on. This contrasted with Dennis's initial unwillingness to move much; his calm, cool, and collected

demeanor emphasized his position as a mentor to Warren, a position that would begin to falter as the play went on. I simply couldn't take my eyes off the actors. The whole show was a dance, something beautiful to watch develop. It takes a keen eye to create a masterpiece as successfully as Anna Shapiro did, but she did it.

The set and lighting were wonderful, as well. The lighting in between scenes would change to show that time had passed, creating shadows giving the effect of evening time and transitioning again to highlight when morning had arrived. I absolutely felt as though I was in a New York City apartment. The set was so intricate, even down to what the kitchen shelves were stocked with: ramen noodles and condensed milk, both of which a poor marijuana dealer would probably have. The whole vibe of the set fit the play perfectly. The props that the actors had to work with were so appropriate as well. Warren utilized the table and chairs well, always sitting down and getting back up, or leaning on the chair when he spoke to Warren. And the phone throughout the play was a great theme. The ringing of the phone always meant something bad was going to happen or made something bad happen in the play, whether it was Dennis's girlfriend calling to fight or Warren's dad to threaten him. Every part of the set was utilized, even the small bathroom and the kitchen.

Perhaps my favorite part of the show, however, was the fact that there was not really a resolution. In a strange way, it is comforting to see a story have a not necessarily happy ending. Warren's last line of, "I guess I'm just going to go home," was so realistic that it was satisfying. Life does not always work out the way people want it to; Warren is going to go back to living with his abusive dad and Dennis will continue to deal drugs. It is a hard world to escape from and so many of us are unable to avoid the trap of youth. I

understood the disheartened words seemingly before they even left Warren's mouth; I knew it would not end happily. But that is okay, and this is the beauty of the play. It lets the audience know that it is okay not to change. Some people never do. But what is important is that the characters acknowledge this. Dennis and Warren have been terrified by the death of the faceless character, Stewart. It gives them a reality check, shows them that their lifestyle of smoking pot and doing cocaine is dangerous and scary; they realize that they are not invincible. But they still do not do anything about it. It is beautiful because it is so accurate to life.

Everything about this performance was phenomenal. From the set to the acting to the talkback afterward, I was so engaged with everything, something that I sometimes struggle with at shows. Hearing how dedicated to the play Kieran Culkin is was fascinating. I feel so fortunate to have been a witness to something so important to him. It makes the experience that much more enriching when the actors are so emotionally involved with the characters. Learning that Kieran had sort of graduated from Warren to Dennis was so interesting. But I loved hearing that he'd played both characters now because he has such a deep understanding for the play. I think that truly made the performance better. If I could go back and see this production five more times, I would. *This Is Our Youth* skyrocketed to the top of my list of favorite plays and I know it will stay there for years to come.