



## Flow



### eta Creative Arts Foundation

(see Resident companies). By Will Power. Dir. Sonita Surratt. With Rashaad Hall, Deja K. Taylor. 1hr 25mins; no intermission.

A looming storm threatens the future of African-American storytelling, and playwright and hip-hop artist Will Power is on a mission to save it. From what, exactly, the black oral tradition needs defense isn't made immediately apparent in his 2003 theatrical slam. Power's indictment reaches from gang violence to religious hypocrisy to the so-called white conspiracy of malt liquor without singling out one main culprit.

His argument lacks specifics, but the message is clear: It's up to us to define the problem and take the helm.

Director Sonita Surratt's production exudes passion, largely due to its kinetic and rhythmically adept two-person cast. As "the seven last storytellers in the neighborhood" fall victim to the changing culture one by one, street rapper MC (Rashaad Hall) trains to take up the post at the hand of Ole' Cheesy, a prophetlike veteran of the form. Hall gives a powerhouse performance and displays remarkable range in his tributes to different community archetypes; his feverish energy is in itself an inspiration. Deja K. Taylor supplies strong vocals that are marred only by eta's overprominent and fuzzy sound system. The focus and youthful spark in these two performers should be enough to grant Power some peace of mind for his art's future, both in the "neighborhood" and everywhere else.—*Dan Jakes*

## Be a Good Little Widow



**Collaboration** (see Resident companies). By Bekah Brunstetter. Dir. Anthony Moseley. With Meghan Reardon, Susan Fay, Tommy Hicks, Christian Blackburn. 1hr 30mins; no intermission.

Young newlywed Melody (Meghan Reardon) is also newly relocated to her husband Craig's small Connecticut hometown. With Craig, who's slightly older, frequently called away on business trips, Melody's left feeling alone and lost in a place where she knows no one, least of all herself.

Most of all, she feels inadequate under the judgmental eye of her patrician mother-in-law, Hope (Susan Fay), who's long structured her life by the unbendable matronly rules of the Widows' League. Things are bad for Melody even before—and here I'd insert a spoiler alert if playwright Bekah Brunstetter's title didn't make this clear—she becomes a widow herself, upon which Hope becomes somehow even less sympathetic.

Brunstetter has a few insights, particularly when it comes to the ways we sometimes try to assert our intimacy with the recently deceased. There's a nicely observed moment in which Hope, Melody and Craig's



assistant, Brad (Christian Blackburn), all lay claim to their familiarity with some minor personality trait of Craig's: "I know." "I also know." "I know, too."

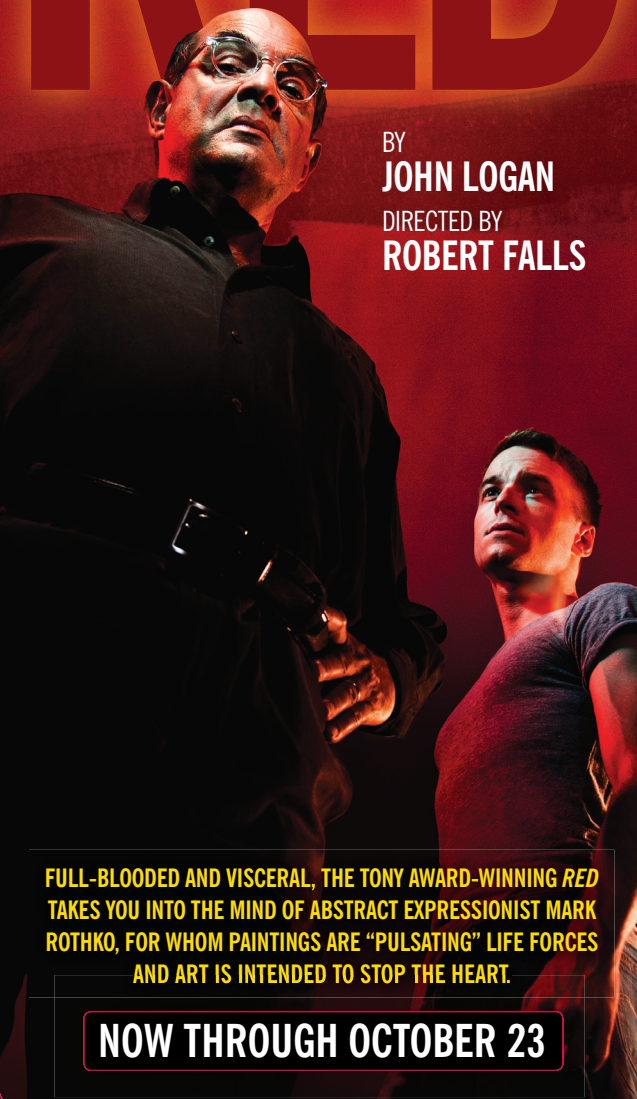
But the well-meaning script has major structural issues, weighed down by its quest for quirk; long passages set to tunes from Melody's iPod feel designed to borrow meaning from the songs, and worse, Brunstetter's timeline is fatally fuzzy. Actors who've dazzled me elsewhere, particularly sleepy-eyed charmer Reardon, are unable to gain a foothold here. Even director Anthony Moseley and set designer John Wilson seem as if they're working a few notches below their usual game in this shoddily paced, visually flat production.—*Kris Vire*

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