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Six Degrees of Separation

by Winnie McCroy
EDGE Editor
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A revival of John Guare's satirical play "**Six Degrees of Separation**" comes alive at Broadway's Barrymore Theatre, with powerhouse player Allison Janney as Ouisa Kittredge creating a palpable chemistry with co-star Corey Hawkins, who plays an enigmatic hustler. Her husband Flan Kittredge is well-played by John Benjamin Hickey. It's abundantly clear why it received the Tony Award nomination for Best Revival of a Play, with Corey Hawkins getting his own Tony nom for Best Actor.

In this 90-minute, intermissionless show, a pair of Upper East

Side art dealers recount the time when a young black man bursts into their home, bleeding from the torso and saying he'd been mugged.

As Paul explains, he's school chums with their kids at Harvard, and needs a place to stay before meeting up with his father, Sidney Poitier, who is in town to cast a film version of the play "Cats." The premise is just nutty enough to be credible.

Paul cooks dinner for the Kittredges and their South African friend Geoffrey (Michael Siberry), helping cement a large deal on a Cezanne painting in the process. As he notes toward the end of the play, he likes how they let him "use all the parts of myself that night."

But the action of the play begins near the ending when their houseguest is caught in flagrante delicto with the hustler (James Cusati-Moyer) he's picked up. As Paul tells Ouisa, "I was so happy, I wanted to add sex to it."

The unrepentant and well-endowed young trick makes a show of carousing around the Kittredge's living room, tossing furniture and pouncing on Flan before grabbing his clothing and insouciantly exiting the premises.

Still, nothing is missing. Nothing tangible ever goes missing -- save some petty cash that is willingly given -- in a play that, as Hickey notes in Playbill, is largely about how Paul makes this couple "sort of see what's fraudulent in their own life."

Ouisa Kittredge's realization of this fact drives the action of the play, which is frankly, riveting. Watching this young man successfully remake himself from a street hustler into a young, well-spoken gentleman is inspiring and heartbreaking, in equal measures.

All Paul wants is to be remade in the Kittredge's image. He bargains with them that he will come clean if they in return will teach him about the art business, even "the grotty parts." As Ouisa tells Flan at the end of the play, "He wanted to be your child. He sat out in that park and said 'that man is my father.'"

Judging from the shitheels that are their legitimate children, they'd be lucky to get Paul. The actors who play the children of the Kittredges and their monied friends are excellent at being awful. Red-haired Tess (Colby Minifie) threatens to get married and move to Afghanistan to spite her parents, while son Woody (Keenan Jolliff) just screams about how they gave his special pink shirt to Paul. Ben (Ned Riseley) is a loser, and Doug (Cody Kastro) berates his dad, calling him "A cretin! A creep! No wonder mother left you!"

The doorman (Tony Carlin) reaffirms this even as he spits on Flan, saying, "I know all about your son... Not the little shit who lives here. The other son. The secret son. The negro son you deny."

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(Source:Joan Marcus)

Ouisa promises Paul that she will be there for him, if he just turns himself into the police and pays his debt to society. Paul wants so much to believe but ends up alone with Ouisa unable to locate him, because "We weren't family. We didn't know Paul's name."

Flan never gets it, but by the end of this tightly-wound 90 minutes, Ouisa rails against the superficial lifestyle they lead, the fact that "we turn [Paul] into an anecdote to dine out on... But it was an experience. I will not turn him into an anecdote."

Kudos go to Mark Wendland's excellent scenic design, featuring a red scrim fronted by a leather couch, armchair and two small tables, meant to indicate the Kittredge's living room. Hanging above is the play's infamous two-sided Kandinsky, rotating slowly. Beyond the screen, the audience gets a glimpse of the Manhattan skyline through a slender window.

Since this play came out, the concept of everyone being only "six degrees of separation" from everyone else has become a trite catchphrase for the entertaining Kevin Bacon game. But as Ouisa notes, it's both tremendously comforting and "like Chinese water torture" to think that we're all so closely connected. Every person is a new door -- and this play looks at what happens when one of these doors is suddenly thrown open.

"Six Degrees of Separation" runs through July 16 at the Barrymore Theatre, 243 W. 47th St. in New York City. For tickets or information, call 212-239-6200 or visit <http://sixdegreesbroadway.com/>



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Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York.



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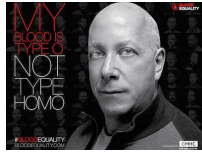
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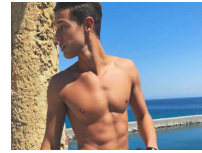
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