



A FAMILY AFFAIR: (left to right) Ruben Santiago-Hudson, Condola Rashad, Mekhi Phifer, Rosie Benton, Tracie Thoms & Dulé Hill in *Stick Fly*. Photo: Richard Termine



Theater Review

Stick Fly: A weekend in the country, on The Vineyard, airing the family's dirty laundry

STICK FLY

Written by Lydia R. Diamond

Directed by Kenny Leon

Original music by Alicia Keys

Cort Theatre

138 West 48th Street

(212-239-6200), www.Stickflybroadway.com

By Scott Harrah

Playwright Lydia R. Diamond (a professor at Boston University) may have thought that, with *Stick Fly*, she was writing an epic dramedy about family, race, and class, but there is more truth, humor and reality in classic episodes of “The Cosby Show” than anything in this ambitious, thought-provoking but thematically hollow saga.

This lavish, highbrow potboiler takes place in an exclusive part of Martha’s Vineyard in the summer of 2005 and chronicles the triumphs and troubles of the LeVay family. They all converge to meet for a weekend. Throughout the weekend, everyone is waiting for the mother to arrive. The father, Joe (Ruben Santiago-Hudson), is a wealthy neurosurgeon. His eldest son, Harold, a/k/a “Flip” (Mekhi Phifer), is a successful plastic surgeon, with a white girlfriend, Kimber (Rosie Benton), but everything is supposedly cool because she studied the

disadvantaged lives of inner-city children as a student at a prestigious university.

The youngest son, Kent, a/k/a "Spoon" (Dulé Hill), is about to have his first novel published, much to the displeasure of his father. Spoon's dad sent him to the best of schools to become a lawyer or a sociologist. Spoon's fiancé, Taylor (Tracie Thoms), is an entomologist studying at Johns Hopkins University. Although Taylor is the daughter of a famous African-American author, her father abandoned her at birth, she is not rich, and has plenty of her own baggage. She has no reservations about letting everyone know the intimate, heavy-handed details of her pent-up frustrations.

Most of the action, haphazardly directed by Kenny Leon, revolves around secrets and dirty family laundry, and tensions erupt between Taylor and Kimber. Within this family's dynamics is Cheryl (Condola Rashad), the 18-year-old temporary maid, subbing for her ailing mother, who is the longtime family maid. Cheryl spends a lot of time talking on the phone to her mom. Ms. Rashad's Cheryl is the most believable and likable character, and she has some of the best lines of dialogue and adds badly needed depth to the otherwise paper-thin narrative.

Grammy-winning R&B icon Alicia Keys gets top billing on the marquee, but she is not actually *in* the play. Ms. Keys simply has some pleasant, original music interspersed between scenes, but they do little more than create "filler" for a show that is already too long for its own good.

Ms. Diamond has a lot of noble, intellectual things to say about race, class, and gender, but her thoughts would be better suited for an academic book of essays because they simply do not work in a Broadway drama.

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