

# 4278 - THEATER REVIEW Thaddeus and Slocum: A Vaudeville Adventure - Gay Lesbian Bi Trans News Archive

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**WINDY CITY TIMES**

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**THEATER REVIEW Thaddeus and Slocum: A Vaudeville Adventure**  
*ERIC KARAS*  
2016-06-22

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**Playwright:**  Kevin Douglas. **At:** Lookingglass Theatre Company, 821 N. Michigan Ave.  
**Tickets:** 312-337-0665; [LookingglassTheatre.org](http://LookingglassTheatre.org); \$40-\$75. **Runs through:** Aug. 14

Lookingglass Theater Company's new world premiere, Thaddeus and Slocum: A Vaudeville Adventure, explores the relationship between a pair of vaudeville performers, one white ( Slocum ) and one African-American ( Thaddeus ).

The pair are Chicago street performers in the early 1900s who dream of being legitimate vaudeville performers on the stage. The Majestic is the white-owned theater they want to perform in but the theater only takes one act with a Black performer and they already have one. Slocum comes up with the idea to perform in blackface and hide their identities. Confusion regarding identity, relationships and art are the results of this decision.

To have performers in blackface on a Chicago stage is a brave thing to do. Lookingglass gets away with it primarily due to the winning performance of Travis Turner as Thaddeus. He embodies an innocence as well as being comfortable in his own skin ( so to speak ) and his subtle discomfort with the whole thing speaks volumes. Samuel Taylor as Slocum is also really good at showing a man desperate for fame while knowing his talents aren't quite up to par with Thaddeus. ( Although we never quite see this. They seem pretty equal to me ). They are fine acrobats in their routines and that's something we've come to expect from this theater company.

There are some other notable performances here. Monica Raymund makes her Lookingglass debut ( through 07/17 ) as Isabella, a headlining singer of popular songs at the Majestic with the secret that she's of mixed race. ( You may know her from the TV show Chicago Fire and she's the grand marshal of this year's Chicago Pride Parade. ) She is lovely and has a nice singing voice as well as a talent for playing the piano. You wish she had more to do in this plot than be the romantic lead.

On the other hand, Sharrisse Hamilton—as Nellie, Isabella's cousin's girlfriend—is such a vibrant character that she takes over every scene and moment in which she's present. You can virtually feel the whole audience lean forward when she is on the stage. She is truly the standout here. Lawrence Distasi is always a scene-stealer at Lookingglass and, in his small role as a desperate booking agent, this is no exception. Tosin Morohunfola, as Isabella's egotistical cousin, is good but you almost wish he'd be even more obnoxious ( just so Nellie could knock him down ).

The real issue with Thaddeus and Slocum is that there is really no sense of urgency here or drama. The villain they introduce actually doesn't become overly villainous until after intermission ( which is too late ), and he's barely in it. Adam Wesley Brown does his most with it but I loved his bad vaudeville comedian more.

When intermission comes there is no tension to bring you back to the show. The drama all comes in the second act and it's too late. You can argue that racism is the villain here and that's quite a villain but again it's not presented in an urgent way. We hear some dialogue about the threats of racism, what will happen if the act is exposed or what will happen if Isabella's identity is exposed or her relationship is revealed, etc., but nothing seems very threatening here. I think Kevin Douglas ( Playwright ) is on to something but his play needs a little shuffling around, plot-wise.

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