

# Review: "In the Master's House There Are Many Mansions" at FringeNYC 2016

NEW YORK

## David Roberts

OnStage Chief New York Theatre Critic

"Their relative ineffectiveness, however, is reflective of larger forces that combined over many decades to make blacks in the city all but invisible. And by now, the truth is that the black community has few genuinely influential advocates in San Francisco's centers of power, the business community, and at City Hall." – Amy Alexander, "The Atlantic"

Following fifteen minutes of a smooth jazz jam session by Noel Freidline (piano and keyboards) and Tim Singh (bass) and a transcendent tap routine by Khalid Hill, the real business of Cherry Jackson's "In the Master's House There Are Many Mansions" begins. And it is not a business for the weak of spirit or the faint of heart. It is a business that requires action, decision, commitment to change, and "discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

Mr. Hill settles onto a stool in front of the two-man jazz band as he assumes a new role yet to be determined. The lights dim and in lighting designer Matt Fergen's chilling shadows, the mortician (played with a vacuous complacency by Jay Morong) finishes his "good work" on his latest Medicaid client Tyrone (played with a disarming but charming virulence by Kineh N'gaojia) and lays him out ready for viewing. Tyrone is one of many young black men who are victims of police violence who end up at the mortician's door and the payments from Medicaid are enough to keep his arms open wide.



Tyrone's childhood friend Larry James Fletcher (played with an exuberant and charmed naiveté by Codara Bracy) has taken off work in the fields and taken the bus up from Gainsboro, Texas to see his slain friend. After completing the Medicaid required grilling (are you married, Mr. Fletcher?) and thumb-printing, Larry approaches Tyrone's covered body; the mortician uncovers his "work" and leaves the room.

What follows is one of the most challenging pieces of theatre in FringeNYC 2016. Tyrone – like Lazarus – comes back from death and he and Larry rehearse their childhood, their adolescence, and their young adulthood as young men of color in what continues to be a world molded by the "Master's" hand. Without having to provide a spoiler alert and diminish the cathartic power of Ms. Jackson's play, it is possible to reveal that "In the Master's House There Are Many Mansions" raises many rich and enduring questions. Why are young black men still being killed as a result of police violence? Do members of black communities across America have any true advocates? Where are these advocates and why are they not more vocal and more proactive?

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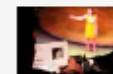
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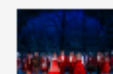
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Under James Vesce's electrifying direction, the cast is uniformly brilliant and engaging. They each bring authenticity and a level of honesty to their characters that challenges the status quo and reverberates through the performance space with disquieting truthfulness.

The title of Cherry Jackson's engaging and disarming 1978 play is a mind-bending distortion of the well-known phrase in John 14:2-3, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." "My Father" has become "the Master" and the verses now are unsettling tropes for systemic racism, white privilege and supremacy.

The play ends with his signature "rapid-fire" up on his toes tap routine by Khalid Hill. Mr. Hill moves in and out of the shadows during the play, sometimes just observing, sometimes assisting the mortician, sometimes weaving in and out of the lives of "the quick and the dead." Death is a funny guy sometimes and – as Tyrone points out – will find his way into your house no matter how hard you try to keep him out. In the case of Tyrone and the three new clients (one riddled by the bullets from a police officer's gun) called in at the end of the play, Death far too often appears in the guise of armed men in uniform called to protect and serve. Who is better off? Tyrone or Larry? The one dead or the one still quickened and believing in the goodness of his master?

This is a play that needs to be seen. Please see it before it closes on August 18, 2016.

#### IN THE MASTERS HOUSE THERE ARE MANY MANSIONS

"In the Master's House There Are Many Mansions" is presented by The New York International Fringe Festival and Twilight Repertory Company at Teatro LATEA at the Clemente, 107 Suffolk Street, 2nd Floor (between Rivington and Delancey).

The cast of "In the Master's House There Are Many Mansions" features Codara Bracy, Khalid Hill, Jay Morong, and Kineh N'goajia. Production photos by Daniel Coston.

For more information about the show including performance dates, the cast, and creative team, please visit <http://www.jamesvesce.com/twilight-repertory-company.html>. For more information about the 20th Annual New York Fringe Festival visit [www.FringeNYC.org](http://www.FringeNYC.org).

Pictured: Khalid Hill. Photographer: Daniel Coston.



Directorial  
Debut: Part  
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DEC 21, 2016

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