



Art imitates life: Gentrification to take center stage in Greenville

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Shea Stephens, Malukah McHerrin-Cobb, Brock Koonce, and Jennifer Webb rehearse for a scene in The Warehouse Theatre's production of Clybourne Park. (Photo: Contributed/Mike Sablone, The Warehouse Theatre)

Story Highlights

- "Clybourne Park" is both a prequel and sequel to "A Raisin In The Sun."
- Two forums are set for "Clybourne Park" — one at 6 p.m. Sept. 20 and another Oct. 4. They are free.

Mike Sablone, Warehouse Theatre's producing artistic director, quickly identified gentrification as one of the most pressing issues in Greenville — if not the most — when he arrived here in January.

The observation partially inspired his decision to kick off the Warehouse Theatre's 2017-18 main stage season with "Clybourne Park," a Pulitzer Prize-winning and Tony Award-winning play by Bruce Norris. The production, which addresses the issue of gentrification, runs from Sept. 22 through Oct. 8.

When trying to program a season, Sablone said he looks at what is happening in a community. He then likes to have plays that allow the audience to see themselves or the issues they're facing portrayed on stage.

"More important than that, I want them entertained. I don't want people thinking they're coming to the theatre to get lectured," he said.

More: [Warehouse Theatre announces 'exciting, engaging' season](#)

"Clybourne Park" is both a prequel and sequel to Lorraine Hansberry's play "A Raisin In The Sun," Sablone said. It examines what gentrification means to a city through a house in a fictional suburb of Chicago in a span of 50 years.

Act 1 takes place in 1959. Act 2 takes place in 2009, when the neighborhood has transformed and a young couple hopes to buy the house and tear it down to benefit from the gentrification of their neighborhood, said Sablone.

"It's a play that examines both race and place and it's very similar conversations separated by 50 years," Sablone said.

While the audience gets to see sort of the progression of race relations in both acts, the play is "very, very funny," Sablone said.

"It makes the weighty stuff less weighty when you're allowed to laugh, be entertained, sort of be drawn into the characters and have a distance from them," Sablone said.

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Jay Briggs, director of the play, said "Clybourne Park" makes the voices of the full cast of characters significant to the story. It's an ensemble structure that highlights the challenge of making progress on any sensitive social issue, he said.

"I don't think it's our job as artists to provide simple answers to complex questions," he said. "If anything, it's our job to complicate, to unsettle, and to make the questions trickier by quite literally 'fleshing' them out — giving them a human face."

The play has some very misguided characters, but it doesn't have any villains, Briggs said.

"The audience is likely to walk out agreeing with one character or another more than others, but if we've done the play well they are also going to have a better understanding of the motivations of the characters with whom they disagree," he said.

More: [Greenville's affordable housing effort just first step, leaders say](#)

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One of the best things a play can do, Sablone said, is leave a person with insight and laughs they didn't have before, but also "an inside perspective into situations that are both very familiar to you and different from you."

"It's like experiencing someone else's drama on stage and seeing how that relates to me, but also understanding a little bit of where they're coming from," he said.

Warehouse Theatre also has a free forum series where the community is invited for a moderated discussion about the themes of the plays and how the plays relate to Greenville.

Two forums are set for "Clybourne Park" — one at 6 p.m. Sept. 20 and another Oct. 4. They are free and open to the public.