

## THE SHIPMENT



By Dan Bacalzo  
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Young Jean Lee is not African-American; and yet, the Korean-American playwright's latest work, *The Shipment*, currently performing at The Kitchen, is an insightful piece about black identity politics that is daring, provocative, and very, very funny.

The work, which is also tightly directed by Lee, is made up of thematically related sketches that address race in various ways. It begins with a dance performed by Prentice Onayemi and Mikeah Ernest Jennings that incorporates movements associated with minstrelsy while remaining dynamic, entertaining, and of course, tongue-in-cheek. The next segment is a stand-up comedy set enacted by the compelling Douglas Scott Streater that addresses white privilege and racial expectations. It's a routine that wouldn't be out of place at most comedy clubs, but still has a subversive edge and pointed anti-racist message.

The next sequence is a delicious satire of an aspiring rap star named Omar (Okieriete Onodowan), who deals with an assortment of wacky characters on his way up, including his mama (Amelia Workman), drug dealing best friend Desmond (Onayemi), prison evangelist Paul the Extreme (Streater), and gay hairdresser Sashay (Jennings). The acting is full of deadpan deliveries and over-the-top mannerisms, and yet each moment is fully inhabited by the talented ensemble members. This segues into an a cappella number featuring exquisite harmony work.

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The final segment of the play is a dinner party hosted by Thomas (Streater), whose guests include his childhood friend Omar (Jennings), co-workers Desmond (Onayemi) and Thomasina (Workman), and Thomasina's friend Michael (Onodowan). The piece has plenty of humor, as Thomas unveils a few surprises for his unsuspecting guests. Jennings is the comic highlight as the socially awkward Omar, while Onayemi also scores with a deep-voiced and hilariously understated delivery.

While the format of the sketch at first appears to be the most conventional part of *The Shipment*, the very end of the piece completely upends everything that came before it, and brings the theme of racial satire squarely back to center stage.