

Theater review

The Shipment

The Kitchen. Written and directed by Young Jean Lee. With ensemble cast. 1hr 30mins. No intermission.



Ever hear the one about the white theater critic and the black identity-politics play by the Korean-American writer? Cracker thought it was all about him! You too may find yourself personalizing Young Jean Lee's *The Shipment*, a fiendishly funny piece of neominstrelsy that snares us in the meshes of racist thought. You sit laughing at Lee's broad caricatures and reversals, all the while furtively taking your own PC temperature. Is this supposed to be funny? Do I really think that way? Perhaps you shouldn't be so self-regarding at a play about the other, but it's a testament to Lee's ability to shove the mirror up to nature.

Half of the 90-minute work is a parody of African-American clichés; the other half is a long, satirical party scene. First up, two dancers (Prentice Onayemi, Mikeah Ernest Jennings) in suits and wide grins shuck and jive to Semisonic's "Fascinating New Thing." Then Douglas Scott Streater takes the stage as a stand-up comic dumping profane scorn on "stupid-ass mothafuckas"—black and white. Next is a deadpan morality tale about a teen rapper (Okieriete Onodowan) who arcs from drugs and prison to fame. The graceful and rich-voiced Amelia Workman rounds out the cast as the rapper's mother and later, his girlfriend. She also harmonizes hauntingly in an a cappella song about despair and death.

In this discomfiting but viciously goofy *mélange*, Lee confirms herself as one of the best experimental playwrights in America. Her language manages to be both feverishly strange and rigorously intellectual, and she directs her charismatic, talented cast with economy and theatrical dash. Ethnic jokes abound here; some might be on you.

— David Cote