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REVIEWS



NU MEN

Reviewed by Deborah Klugman
GWC Productions at the Zephyr Theatre
Through April 28

In playwright George Corbin's *Nu Men*, five aging fraternity brothers get the fright of their lives when their reunion is torpedoed by a trio of young African soldiers looking to score plunder and stoke fear.

Hosted by Colonel Samuel Obulu (Alexander Harris), the reunion takes place in 1995 in the fictional African country of Membia. The African-born colonel had been educated in the United States before returning some years prior to his native country. His military rank, some cryptic phone calls and the pronounced unease of his servant Charles (Tejah Bah) clue us in from the start that Membia may not be the safest locale for a nostalgic get-together. But despite Charles's anxious queries, the colonel is confident that the fighting is sufficiently distant so that his shindig, which he's spent extravagantly on, will not be interrupted or sabotaged.

The colonel's friends include Bro Doc (Jonaton Wyne), a medical doctor, Bro Benny (Lamont Young), an attorney, Bro Jay (Gary Robinson), a preacher and Bro WB (Mark Leland), a teacher and the only white guy among the group. The first half of the play is made up of reminiscences and male bonding, although the brotherhood vibe starts to fade when Jay and Doc fall into a heated quarrel about politics and religion.

But those differences evaporate soon enough when the party is crashed by three youths gleefully brandishing knives and automatic weapons. They tie up the colonel and his guests, who become afraid (not without reason) that their time has come. The situation becomes a test of their courage and regard for one another.

At its core *Nu Men*, which is directed by Bill White, revolves around the encounter between a relatively privileged group of people — the issues of race in the U.S. notwithstanding, these are all professionals and graduates of Howard University — with people whose ruthless desperation and penchant for murder and violence are born of poverty and hopelessness.

The first half of the play is top heavy with exposition about the past, and the drama doesn't really spark till the entry of the young guerillas: their swaggering leader, Sergeant David (Ayuba Adu) the gleefully homicidal Killer (Orlando Magnus Griffin) and the impressionable Cookie (Santiago Sloan), who'd been kidnapped and drafted into the guerilla force when he was 8 and is regarded with special concern by the sergeant who'd been 12 at the time.

All three actors have presence, especially Adu whose delivery is crisp and honed. Considering his character is a crazed maniac — it would be easy to go overboard — Griffin handles the role with

and friends to steady, war-torn, lined for a teaming, dismissing the dangers, and that they all would have accepted.

GWC Productions at the Zephyr Theatre, 7456 Melrose Ave., Hollywood; Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun. 3 p.m.; through Apr. 28. (213) 908-5032 or . Running time: approximately 90 minutes with no intermission.



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