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## Two actors, 15 characters deliver 90 minutes of fun

Thomas, Ramsey shine in story of Bronx 10th-graders staging play

By TOM BUTLER

Special to *The News Journal*

The latest production at the Delaware Theatre Company demonstrates a theme dear to the players -- the transformative power of theater on society.

That is evident through the superb acting of Chandra Thomas and Kevin Ramsey, who power a funny and instructive 90 minutes of theater.

Originally a one-person show performed by the author, Nilaja Sun's "No Child ..." describes the attempts of an artist in the schools to stage a play with Bronx 10th-graders.

The action was based on Sun's experiences doing just that.

Director Anne Marie Cammarato has opened up the action by dividing the voices of 15 characters between the two actors. This allows for some more effective dialogue while still asking both actors to portray characters of varied sex, age and ethnicity.

Thomas becomes the vivacious and passionate teacher, called Miss Sun, as well as many of the students. She is brilliant in creating the teacher, using a warm, naturalistic style. Her ability to bounce among three or four different characters and to carry on lucid conversations among them is equally impressive. Lithe and athletic, Thomas introduces a vital physicality to the performance that blends dance and mime into the presentation.

Ramsey does more supporting work, allowing the audience to view and hear some critical discussions between Sun and her rowdy pupils. The interaction between them is most dramatic when Ramsey portrays Jerome, the class leader who displays a mastery of acting that surprises Sun and the audience.

The same is true later when he is Phillip, a mumbling, overweight kid who shows the audience how persuasive and effective a teacher Sun truly is. Ramsey does some of his best work as Baron, an 80-year old janitor who presents much of the exposition and provides historic perspective on the vagaries of the New York City school system.

The story line has enough tension and conflict to keep viewers engaged. The depictions of a variety of "real" teachers -- from the noble but ineffectual Miss Tam to the forceful Mr. Johnson -- also ring true. Thomas gets great comedy as well as great impact from her portrayal of a Jamaican security guard with his treasured metal detector.

As always, the production values at DTC are first rate. Beowulf Boritt's minimal set features a teacher's desk and some student chairs but includes a huge outline map of the United States on the floor. The twenty plain light fixtures suspended above the stage suggest the utilitarian design of a real classroom.

Fabian Obispo incorporates actual student commentary and songs recorded at the Ferris School for Boys into the sound design. The DTC cast and company worked with students at the juvenile secure care facility doing just the sort of theatrical development shown in the play.

Ramsey has been a favorite at DTC for years. He wrote and directed "Sam Cooke: Forever Mr. Soul" and directed "The Piano Lesson." He worked as a choreographer on some earlier shows. Both Ramsey and Thomas have substantial TV and film experience in addition to their theatrical work.

## Additional Facts

IF YOU GO

**WHAT:** "No Child..." by Nilaja Sun

**WHEN:** 8 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday; 2 p.m., Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday until Feb. 1

**WHERE:** Delaware Theatre Company, 200 Water St., Wilmington

**COST:** \$47-\$15

**INFORMATION:** 594-1100 or [www.delawaretheatre.org](http://www.delawaretheatre.org)

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