

# Powerful Dutchman Performed at MMT

My mouth was open so wide that you could have shoved a Cortland apple inside it as I tried to take in all of the intensity. “How did we get to this point?” I thought as the conclusion of *Dutchman* — Mixed Magic Theatre (MMT)’s take on Amari Baraka’s play from 1964 — unfolded before my eyes. I felt shocked at the turn of events, and wondered what it meant.

With a run time of about 45 minutes, somehow the tension between the straight-play’s two main characters bubbled over into person-on-person conflict that I had subconsciously hoped to avoid. Although it made audience members feel a bit uncomfortable, so had the play’s increasingly heated dialog up to that point, and in a way, the story’s climax was inevitable.

Directed by MMT artistic director Jonathan Pitts-Wiley, one of the only people other than the two stars to grace the stage at all throughout the performance, the play starred Yakim Parker as Clay, and Kerry Giorgi as Lula. Clay is a black man who was riding the New York City subway alone before being approached by Lula, a boisterous white woman who engaged Clay in discussions about race, class and gender. Lula’s anti-gay Jewish, gay and black rhetoric established friction that Clay first tried to downplay; however, eventually it got the best of him, and he payed a hefty price for his reaction to the woman’s taunts.

Looking back, the violent height of *Dutchman* was a critical part of driving its theme home. It made it impossible for viewers to downplay not just the racially charged subtext of Lula’s verbal attacks on Clay, but also the internal rage and hurt that it ignited in him. I appreciate MMT’s powerful rendering of the play and now understand why it won an Obie Award for Best Play and is considered a seminal work for the Black Arts Movement of the ’60s and ’70s. Most importantly, I agree with MMT that it is just as relevant today as it was back then.

MMT’s production of *Dutchman* was held at the theater’s renovated, historic complex at the Lorraine Mills in Pawtucket. Concurrently (just beyond a soundproof wall), MMT is showing its production of *The Slave*, another of Baraka’s works. *Dutchman* was performed in the more intimate theater within the complex.

*Dutchman and The Slave are at Mixed Magic Theater, 560 Mineral Spring Ave, in an extended run through Jan 7. For tickets, visit [mmtri.com](http://mmtri.com)*