

Flip-in, Mysticism and Marriage on the Rocks

By Charles White, Harlem Playwrights 21

John Shévin Foster's *Flip-in* is a thirty-minute urban folk tale that premiered on March 31, 2016 at the HERE Arts Center in New York City as part of the Downtown Urban Arts Festival. The play is an exploration of a troubled marriage. Nia (Gillian Glasco) and Trashaun (Reginald L. Barnes), a young couple, are clearly having a hard time adjusting to each other's needs and schedules. Each has a demanding career. Nia is a corporate executive who is under pressure to bring in clients. Trashaun is an up-and-coming music producer at a record label who is working on an album with his assistant, Keesha (Kaili Y. Turner), and young rapper, A Roc (Marco Munoz). Trashaun spends all of his time at work, and Nia suspects that Keesha is providing Trashaun with more than professional services.

Lights go up on a bedroom with a sleeping Trashaun and an agitated Nia trying to wake him up. They are going to a birthday party given by Trashaun's family in Philadelphia for 99-year old Great Aunt Lula. Nia is ready and knows that Trashaun's family will blame her if they are late. Their exchange is hilarious. Trashaun wants Nia to tell his family they'll make it next year. Nia suggests that he tell Great Aunt Lula he "hopes" she'll be around for the party next year. Actually Trashaun is spooked about encountering Great Aunt Lula who is from the South and allegedly can "work roots". City girl Nia thinks this means that Great Aunt Lula cooks "country vegan." Understanding how to get Trashaun's attention, Nia tells him that he got a call from the job. He jumps to return the call, after which a frustrated Nia lets him have it: "We're going for days without speaking, and when we do, it's an argument. We're starting to have separate lives -- you're not around for mine and you won't let me be in yours!" Trashaun offers a weak response and, at Nia's insistence, they make the trip.

A Roc and Keesha take the stage and go through several bars of the rap song they are working on. This foreshadowing interlude is both clever and funny. When they exit, Trashaun and Nia return from their family party and something is radically different. For the sake of the audience's pleasure, all I will say about this change is that Great Aunt Lula has struck. However, the skills of director Jae Antoinette Broderick and the thespian expertise of Barnes and Glasco clearly communicate this change with minimal dialogue. And by no means am I minimizing the dialogue. Foster knows how to craft a line that moves the action forward and delivers a sharp comic punch.

Great Aunt Lula's powers enable Trashaun and Nia to learn things about each other they never realized. Each visits the other's place of business and has a revelation about the challenges and pressures that the other faces. Munoz and Turner, both in fine comic form, portray Nia's business associates as well as A Roc and Keesha. Back in their bedroom, Nia and Trashaun emotionally debate a serious question: "Do we want to fix this?"

The climax is an impulsive exercise of male ego and power that frightens the troubled couple. This, of course, brings them closer together. *Flip-in* is a laugh-out-loud comedy with acute insight into the battle of the sexes. Don't miss it.