Day-after reviews

In This World

Teen friendship put to the test in Moscovitch’s explosive play

By Jon Kaplan

IN THIS WORLD by Hannah Moscovitch (Youtheatre/Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People, 165 Front East). Sunday (May 16) at 11:30 am and 2 pm. $15-$20, morning show pwyc). 416-862-2222. See listing.

Rating: NNNN

In This World, a show for young audiences, is another winner for playwright Hannah Moscovitch (East Of Berlin, The Russian Play).

A look at what friendship means to two teens who've just had a brutal fight at high school, the play also deals with racism, class and reputation.

Blond, privileged, Rosedale-bred Bijou (Hannah Cheesman) was best friends with Neyssa (Sharon James), the daughter of Jamaican immigrants; the two are on the school volleyball team and hang together all the time. Now, after the brawl that opens the play, they sit in detention, waiting for a teacher.

At a party in Bijou’s house a few days before, Neyssa ended up in the basement with Bijou’s ex while her host was making out with Neyssa's cousin. Should Bijou have looked out for Neyssa? Was Neyssa coerced into what happened in the basement? Do their social backgrounds affect how they see each other and are viewed by others?

Moscovitch’s intense script, directed by Youtheatre’s Michel Lefebvre, captures the characters’ raw anger and pain – the sense of abandonment, worry how parents will react, concern about peers. The two actors physicalize their work beautifully across the vast, empty space of Véronique Bertrand’s set, which seems to float in the air. Each has her own space, and it’s emotionally telling when one does (or doesn’t) enter the other’s domain.

Both performers know how to use explosive moments, but just as importantly, how to suggest the tension that builds up in what’s not said.

Moscovitch doesn’t shy away from believable teen language, which causes some of the high-school audience (the show’s recommended for those 13 and up) to gasp at hearing words like “whore” and “slut” onstage. She also surprises us narratively; the play seems to be about Bijou at the start, but it subtly shifts to focus on Neyssa.

The script doesn’t provide a solution or even all the pieces of the puzzle of what happened at the party, but it’s sure to stir up a discussion with your teens.

By coincidence, the Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People bookended its season with two pieces about date rape, though the scripts are totally different in how they make their point. Blind Spot, presented in November, was about an issue, didactic without offering much in the way of drama. In contrast, In This World is powerful theatre, with fully realized characters believably invested in the work’s emotional stakes.