

# Los Angeles Times

## 'Moon' Takes Hard-Hitting Look at Poverty

By Philip Brandes

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Far too little has changed since Errol John penned "Moon on a Rainbow Shawl," his clear-sighted 1957 drama about the tragic cycle of poverty and the shame and desperate actions it begets.

Transcending the play's period setting in John's native Trinidad, a hard-hitting revival by the Caribbean American Repertory Theatre West depicts a far more disturbing portrait of poverty than the one of immoral masses that is conveniently dismissed in hyperbolic welfare reform rhetoric. Instead, it brings us face to face with highly moral individuals driven by circumstance to betray their better natures.

In a close-quartered housing tract, an amiable young trolley driver, learning his girlfriend is pregnant and horrified at the dead-end life threatening to ensnare him, mercilessly prepares to abandon her and seek better fortune in England. His neighbor, a former cricket star fallen on hard times, resorts to burglary to restore his self-respect and pay for his gifted daughter's expensive schooling.

A slow starter, the play ambles at the outset through an overabundance of peripheral characters. But after finding its focus it never falters. Director Jeffrey Anderson-Gunter builds emotional intensity with a sure hand, and moves us to understanding rather than judgment.

Since the production features different casts on alternating weekends, performance dynamics will vary. The reviewed "Bam" cast (returning next Friday-Aug. 11 and Aug. 23-25) was superb, with particularly affecting scenes between Gordon Greene as the driver and Karen Ffolkes as his devastated lover. **Andre Bonner was a towering pillar of endurance as the long-suffering wife of the cricketer** (Austin Stoker), and Veralyn Jones provided comic sparkle as a sassy, unrepentant prostitute. The alternate "Bim" cast plays this weekend and Aug. 16-18.

\* "Moon on a Rainbow Shawl," Stage Lee Theatre, Lee Strasberg Creative Center, 7936 Santa Monica Blvd., West Hollywood. Fridays, Saturdays, 8 p.m.; Sundays, 3 p.m. Ends Aug. 25. \$15. (213) 650-7777. Running time: 2 hours, 20 minutes.