

Troupe turns up the wit in 'Fences'

■ EGYPT production of play about struggles of African Americans in the '50s is both hilarious and compelling

By Annette Cary
CORRESPONDENT

AUGUST Wilson's "Fences" combines domestic comedy and issues of social injustice to dramatize the economic and internal struggles that many African-American families faced during the 1950s. This award-winning play gives the audience a good idea of how many families coped with racism and economic oppression. It's running weekends through Feb. 6 at the Experimental Group Young People's Theater (EGYPT), 5306 Foothill Blvd., Oakland.

Lamont A. Cole is convincing in the lead role as the 53-year-old garbage collector, Troy Maxon.

REVIEW

- "Fences"
- Experimental Group Young People's Theater (EGYPT Co.) Art Center
- 5306 Foothill Blvd., Oakland
- 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays, 4 p.m. Sundays through Feb. 6
- Tickets: \$6-\$8. Available by reservation or through TIX Bay Area, Union Square in San Francisco.
- 436-4877
- ★★★ (Humorous and compelling)

Although James Earl Jones' 1987 performance as Maxon in San Francisco is a tough act to follow, Cole's interpretation was impressive.

The first act opens with Maxon and his co-worker and best friend Jim Bono (played by Char-

loth) after work at Maxon's home, relaxing and reminiscing about their early years. Maxon's story-telling is hilarious; Bono says it reminds him of Uncle Remus.

Maxon, married 18 years to Rose (Veronica Y.), produced two sons: Lyon (A.G. Harris), a sly and dapper unknown jazz musician; and Cory (Noel Harris), a high school football star who hopes to become a professional player. When Cory is offered a college football scholarship, Maxon refuses permission for fear that his son will face the same injustice and disappointment he faced pursuing a professional baseball career during segregation.

The play's high point unfolds when Rose's anger over Maxon's confession of infidelity builds emotion and brings out cheers from the audience. The message in this scene highlights Maxon's vulnerability to life's temptations, lack of responsibility and desire to escape from the pressures of

home. He tries to amend his shortcomings by completing the white picket fence Rose wants, which is symbolic of keeping life's problems on the outside and his family stronger on the inside.

Wilson's clever satire throughout the play provides an outlet for Maxon's feelings about racial oppression and his efforts to cope with economic pressures.

Although the play revolves around an African-American family, their problems aren't totally race-related, but are shared by many families trying to cope with the economic and social nature of life in the United States.

The front-porch setting suggested by Wilson and designed by director Sean Alberts effectively conveys the lifestyle of a middle-class family in an undisclosed rural town. Unfortunately the lighting doesn't capture mood changes from one scene to another, and the audience will find themselves in the dark a bit too long for comfort during set changes.