

## STAGE REVIEW

### Dame Lorraine

L.A. Actors' Theatre  
Opened Jan. 13 through Feb. 27

"*Dame Lorraine*," the last play in Steve Carter's Caribbean-American trilogy, is a haunting tragedy about the brutalization of a black family by the street life of Harlem.

"I walk down the street with my boys and everybody stand aside and look," says Picton Moulinaux proudly. But there are moments when Picton's memories of his stunning boys are fouled by nightmares of the aftermath of the Festival of *Dame Lorraine*, when three of his sons raped their sister Angela and beat their father into mental and physical ruin. Seven of the demon sons are killed, victims of their own violent world.

As the play opens, Picton, his wife Dorcas, daughter-in-law Reenie, daughter Angela and her lover Sal await the return of the eighth son, King, from 30 years in prison. Each has a deadly reason for hating King but none of them can forget his beauty, his evil, his fascination.

Though there are moments when the play skirts perilously near melodrama, it is redeemed by the lyric quality of the writing, the tender relationship between Picton and Dorcas. Carter's faithful transcript of a Jamaican ambiance and his evocation of the suffering parents of a monstrous brood and the societies that created both.

Davis Roberts gives a poignant and delicate portrayal of the mind-scrambled father, with Esther Rolle a commanding presence as Dorcas, the mother who focuses the play. Emily Yancy catches to perfection the diffident obsessed Reenie, King's wife. Denise Nicholas-Hill plays the traumatized Angela as a cold, nervous, emotionally sealed woman. Thom Christopher finds the vigor and flashing charm of Sal, half Negro, half Italian, and the intensity to rage over the hell life thus created.

Edmund J. Cambridge directs with sensitivity and a solid utilization of playing space. Though the cast seemed to be still settling into their roles during the first scene, by the 2nd Act the play was considerably tighter.

Fred Chuang designed the set, with its appropriately hideous wallpaper and shabby gentility.

—Laura Hitchcock

