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Move Over Tyler Perry – Here Comes Nial Martin and No Jive Productions



First play, "His Double Life, in Sanders family's saga will make you laugh and cry

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We are all familiar with Madea, the hilarious character of the stage and screen, conceived, portrayed and made famous – if not infamous – by the one-and-only Tyler Perry. But there's another young Black brother who has emerged from the wings with a trilogy of staged productions about Momma Sanders – a real woman, wife and mother by the way – and her clan that has audiences buzzing in South Florida and throughout the southeastern U.S.

And with the rising fame of No Jive Productions, Inc., and its 30-something founder, CEO, writer, director and producer, Nial Martin, it may be appropriate to tell Perry to "watch out" or at least to "move over and make room."

Martin is all too familiar with the vicissitudes of life that accompany being a Black man in America. But when the issue of sexual identity is added to the mix, the complexities and sometimes even the barriers to success become even more challenging. But Martin, the consummate perfectionist who has been working on making his dream come true since he was a high school student brainstorming with friends, continues to plug away, increasing his fan base and producing some amazingly good plays.

The Miami-based No Jive Productions, Inc., founded in 1996, focuses on issues that include love, forgiveness, healing and sexual identity. Most recently in an encore performance that was also recorded for DVD filming that will be released in time for the Christmas shopping season, Martin brought a new cast of mostly local actors who did a stellar job in this revised presentation of "His Double Life."

The play is the first of a three-part series about a typical, Black family who illustrates that phrase made famous by poet Maya Angelou: "We are more alike than unalike."

And despite the play making its second appearance in South Florida, the almost 1,200-seat Joseph Caleb Auditorium, located in the heart of Miami's mostly-Black Liberty City community, had very few empty seats – a testament to the reputation for high-quality works earned by Martin, his staff and actors.

Martin says that comments continue to pour in from fans that came from as far as the West Coast and even Aruba to see the show. So far, their remarks have been encouraging – at times even full of praise and thanks for his courage in producing shows that have helped them to face their own personal demons.

"One of our goals for No Jive Productions is to open up dialogue within families so that there is better communication on a variety of issues," Martin said. "In 'His Double Life,' the conflict centers on a father who has difficulty accepting his son for a number of reasons, including his sexuality."

JQ, 28 and Brittany L. Smith, 23, are featured as Matthew Sanders (the embattled son) and Vanessa Clark (his girlfriend) who appear to be the perfect couple – longtime sweethearts since high school. But Matthew is forced to come to grips with the fact that has feelings for someone else, his best friend Theo Martin, played by Thomas Troy Brooks. As he seeks clarity in his life and his secret is uncovered, Matthew finds himself walking down a lonely and unfamiliar path.

"Black theater is needed to tell Black stories . . . it's needed to stimulate audiences and to arouse conversations about sensitive issues," said Smith, a Miami native with the beauty that reflects her Virgin Island heritage. "No Jive doesn't play it safe in dealing with the theme of homosexuality, a less-than-perfect husband and the fragile relationship between a father and his son."

JQ, who has been acting for five years and recently moved to LA in efforts to propel his career to greater heights, shines in the play, including a moving monologue that he nails with great emotion near the conclusion of the play. He has the skills, the demeanor and the physique needed to take him far.

"Some will say that that Matthew lives his double life as a lie but I disagree – he meant no harm and only sought approval and love," JQ said. "The key is that he wants people to accept him as he is not for what he isn't. The show has caused me to reach back into my own closet and feed on those moments of doubt I used to have about my sexual identity."

Other actors to look out for include the sultry and seductive Duvonne Moore who plays Vanessa's best friend, Wynnika Jones and is the vamp that will keep you in stitches; Nathaniel Cooper as the multi-layered and troubled father, Daddy Sanders; and the best friend and love interest, Theo played by Brooks.

As for Tyler Perry, Martin says that he is honored by the comparison but thinks his work and his theater company offer something unique and different from the more comedic productions of Perry. Martin readily admits that he has suffered a wide range of bumps and bruises in his young life, including the emptiness that comes from never having a relationship with his father. But he has clearly weathered the storm, using that pain to inform his work while helping others with similar challenges.

The result is pure magic!

For more information go to www.nojiveproductions.org

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