

A Seat on the Aisle...

..in the theater or on a plane. Postings on what I've recently seen, where I've recently been, and whatever else might strike my mind.

By Alan Miller

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[When Black Boys Die at Theater for the New City](#)



L-R: R. Ashley Bowles, Scarlett Smith, Lorenzo A. Jackson, and Brandon Mellette in WHEN BLACK BOYS DIE. Photo by Rosalie Baijer.

William Electric Black is an exceptionally versatile, talented and socially conscious writer whose interests range from encouraging exercise and good nutrition for children to prescription drug awareness and obesity and stroke prevention. A seven time Emmy Award winning writer for his work on Sesame Street, he is currently engaged in writing, producing, and directing a series of five plays (collectively called **Gunplays**) addressing the dangers of inner city violence and guns.

The first of these plays, **[Welcome Home Sonny T.](#)**, a powerful politically correct polemic in favor of gun control and the rights of illegal aliens, was staged at the Theater for the New City (TNC) on First Avenue in lower Manhattan a little more than a year ago and we enjoyed it immensely. Now the second play in the series, **When Black Boys Die**, is premiering at the

TNC and, much as we enjoyed [Welcome Home Sonny T.](#), we liked when **Black Boys Die** even more.

When Black Boys Die centers on the untimely shooting death of Levon Weeks (Torre Reigns), a remarkable young man who, despite having been raised by a single mother in the projects, is on the verge of entering Syracuse University on a basketball scholarship. His death occurs in the wake of his coming to the aid of Cece Torres (Scarlett Smith) to prevent her from being raped by Dray Oliver (Brandon Mellette), a neighborhood gang leader and drug dealer – and his death has repercussions throughout the neighborhood. Ruby Weeks (Verna Hampton), Levon’s mother, becomes obsessed by the desire to engage the community into taking action against the senseless gun violence that has taken her son’s life by listing and posting the names of everyone killed in the community since her son’s death on the Fourth of July. And Danielle Weeks (Brittney Benson), Levon’s sister and Cece’s friend, is driven to try to find out exactly what happened on the fateful day.

The play is well written and beautifully acted and not without its surprises. Mr. Jackson (Lavern Williams), a high school art teacher who tries valiantly to mentor and inspire the neighborhood youth, provides a moral counterbalance to the depravity of gangbangers like Dray and his sidekick, JB (Lorenzo A. Jackson). And even “Say What” (R. Ashley Bowles), an elderly neighborhood street vendor, has his moment in the sun, suggesting that even the least among us ought not be taken for granted, let alone counted out.

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