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Trio Explores Being Black And Gay

Misha Berson

----- "Dark Fruit," by the Pomo Afro Homos. Directed by Susan Finque. Pioneer Square Theatre, 512 Second Ave. Tonight-Sun. 322-5423.

Whether they're sending up absurd stereotypes of black homosexuals, exploring the unresolved connection between adult son and dying mother, or firing off angry letters to blacks and whites who won't face up to the AIDS epidemic, the Pomo Afro Homos keep an audience turned on and tuned in.

The Pomo Afro Homos are three appealing, gifted actor-writers: Brian Freeman, Djola Branner and Eric Gupton.

On their third visit to Seattle, this San Francisco-based trio of "post-modern African-American homosexuals" is again sponsored by the Alice B. Theatre. While too candidly explicit for some, their work is bound to attract large, welcome-back crowds of blacks and whites, gays and straights.

"Dark Fruit," the new show they've brought, doesn't boogie along as jazzily as their break-through first work, "Fierce Love." It has a more reflective, more personal tone. And it stays intent on probing the conflicted relationships black gay men face in a voice that's angrier - though still not embittered.

The most humorous of the show's five skits is "Black & Gay: A Psycho-Sex Study," a lampoon of a cheapie, pseudo-scientific porno novel from the 1960s. It depicts the downfall of a "Negroid" teenager (Gupton) after a white "Caucasoid" classmate (Freeman) makes a pass at him. The two are discovered in each other's arms by a prudish teacher (Branner) and punished separately - but not equally.

Cheesily funny, the parody also exposes racist attitudes that still seem a tad too close for comfort.

"Sweet Sadie" gives the tall, dancery Branner room to ruminate on growing up in South Central Los Angeles with Sadie, his single mother. Branner's recollection of their relationship is so impressionistic it's at times hard to get a grip on; we learn just enough to want to know more.

Still, the vivid images Branner shares - zipping up his mother's dress as she primps, her outrage when she learns he's gay - say a lot. And his ambivalence toward the dying Sadie, expressed in words and agile movements, is truthful and touching.

Gupton takes his solo turn in a short, pointed monologue about a disappointing one-night stand, and Freeman contributes a impassioned elegy for a transsexual.

The show ends on a rousing polemic, "Chocolate City U.S.A.," in which Magic Johnson, the black church, and even the group ACT-UP get called to task for ignoring black gay men with AIDS.

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