

'To Kill a Mockingbird' Classic story, timeless issue

By Sarah Hinckley
TIMES ARGUS STAFF

In a surprise twist for the second production of "To Kill a Mockingbird" in 10 years — the directors of the Lost Nation Theater production didn't have to scout for talent outside Vermont.

When the theater first presented the stage adaptation of Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel eight years ago, black actors were brought in from Boston and New York City. For the April 24-May 11 performances all 15 actors are from the Green Mountain State, including African-American actor Edgar Davis who plays Tom Robinson.

It is the second time Davis, 46, has filled the role of Tom Robinson, the man Atticus Finch is assigned to defend against an accusation of rape. The first time was 15 years ago when Davis performed with the St. Paul History Theater, which was also the first time he sat down with the novel.

"I love the book, it's a well-written story," said Davis, explaining how the ability to tell a story is becoming a lost art. "It's not really about the characters. It's about what they do ... It's the concept of being pulled forward. You don't stop for a joke. You don't stop for a car crash."

Last season Lost Nation Theater polled audience members to see what shows during

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Lost Nation Theater

Lost Nation Theater presents a professional production of "To Kill a Mockingbird," the Harper Lee classic, April 24-May 11, at City Hall Arts Center, 39 Main St. in Montpelier. Curtain is at 7 p.m. Thursday and Sunday (except May 11 at 2 p.m.), 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, plus a 2 p.m. matinee, Saturday, April 26. Tickets are \$25-\$10; call (802) 229-0492, or go online to www.lostnationtheater.org.



Kim Bent as Atticus Finch, right, speaks to (from left) Michael Bresette as Jem, Adam Blachly as Dill and Liz Gilbert as Scout, as Meredith Watson as Calpurnia, center, and Anna Soloway as Jean Louise Finch look on during a rehearsal for Lost Nation Theater's production of "To Kill A Mockingbird."



Jeb Wallace-Brodeur/Times Argus

Mark Roberts as Mr. Gilmer, left, faces off in court against Edgar L. Davis as Tom Robinson, right, as Walt Levering as Judge Taylor and Anna Soloway as Jen Louise Finch look on during a rehearsal for Lost Nation Theater's production of "To Kill A Mockingbird."

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its 20-year history were their favorites.

"To Kill a Mockingbird" was the number one response," said Kathleen Keenan, producing artistic director, who feels this second production is shaping up to be even better than the first. "Every once in awhile a show comes along that feels special, and this is one of those."

Since moving to Hardwick in 2004, Davis has been in three productions where he was cast to play an African-American character. But Davis is quick to downplay the idea of type-casting.

"In my opinion, in order to be an actor you have to get on stage," he said. "It's a visual medium and people respond to you visually."

Davis was part of the cast for Champlain College's production of "A Raisin in the Sun," which is a play he says would

be impossible to pull off without black actors.

But Davis does not deny that awareness of his race has not been an issue in Vermont. He admits to always checking to make sure he has enough fuel in his vehicle when driving rural roads. Davis doesn't want to put himself in a situation where he may be knocking on a stranger's door late at night asking for help.

"We would like to think that race isn't an issue, but it still is," said Keenan. "We're a little better now than we were 30, 40, 60 years ago, but, yeah, it still exists."

Keenan and Davis both explain there are more elements to the story than that of race. They all contribute to making the play not only a powerful experience, but one with an opportunity to educate viewers and spark discussion.

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