

Not “Yes, but” but “Yes, and”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Arts, the, Touchstone Theater October 30, 2019

 66th in a series of posts on Touchstone Theatre 

Hidden Seed: Bethlehem’s Forgotten Utopia

There’s a dramatic moment right in the middle of the panel discussion after Festival UnBound’s “Hidden Seed” performance at which moderator Jennie Gilrain turns passionately to the actress who plays Margaret, the Moravian woman, and exclaims:

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The message for us in Jennie’s mock-violent impulse is strong.

Can anyone doubt that our national culture is fractured along racial lines?

Is there anyone who doesn’t want our hometown to welcome diversity, to be characterized by more equality and community — the focal topics of the panel discussion?

We had that kind of town . . . in the beginning . . . for a brief time.

“In the first two decades,” says play author-historian Seth Moglen, “the Moravians built a racially integrated city that abolished poverty, shared wealth equally, emancipated women to be leaders, and provided free education, health care, child care, and elder care to all.”

“A racially integrated city.”

That’s our forgotten utopia.

That's our present dream.

Listen to Margaret:

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The Bethlehem utopia attracted the young Margaret. It was a place where she loved her Native sisters. However, when Margaret is confronted by her Native and African sisters with the failure of that utopia, she bobs and weaves, she stammers, she excuses, she evades, she backpedals, she blames, she rationalizes, she avoids, she repels.

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We had a City on a Hill, but . . . but . . . but.

In short, see Margaret, the white woman, full of “yes, buts.”

Over and over again.

And Jennie wants to wring her neck

because she sees herself in Margaret.

Exactly.

Doesn't that plant an arrow to the future equitable community that we in Bethlehem want?

The road to that ideal city is paved with our recognition *and* consequent action.

“Yes, and now what?” should be our motto.

Enough of bobbing and weaving.

The Festival was about identifying and pursuing the “what(s).”