

**Andrew J. Friedenthal**

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**Review: “Single Black Female” is a seriously funny look at black womanhood today**

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Here’s another blog-exclusive review—[the newest production of \*Single Black Female\*](#), by Austin’s own Lisa B. Thompson.

In addition to being a Professor of African and African Diaspora Studies at UT Austin, Thompson is also one of Austin’s most successful and prolific playwrights. Of those creative works, her most famous is probably *Single Black Female*, which has been produced all across the United States and Canada, with a published script coming out from Samuel French in 2012.



Valoneecia Tolbert & Michelle Alexander (photo by Dave Hawks).

The latest production of *Single Black Female* comes from Austin’s Ground Floor Theatre (running through February 29<sup>th</sup>) and shows that the play still has its finger on the pulse of issues that are central to middle class black women today. Indeed, at the very beginning of the play, the two protagonists—known only as SBF1 and SBF2—clearly state that their goal is to represent those middle class black women’s lives, making no pretense to exposing the entire range of additional issues faced by black women who live beneath the poverty line.

As such, *Single Black Female* remains breezy and fun for most of the text, exploring issues of love, friendship, family, sex, and even gynecology from a witty, sarcastic, tongue-in-cheek perspective. While it doesn’t stray away from issues of structural racism and classism, its focus is on interpersonal relationships, exposing how those issues come out in daily microaggressions rather than in the more dramatic (and frequently deadly) ways that we see far too often on the nightly news.

What’s more, Thompson doesn’t let the two women—who gradually transition from generic stand-ins of “types” of middle class black women into fully realized (albeit nameless) characters—simply be recipients of injustice, but also questions the way that their success puts them, occasionally, on the problematic side of class relations. In this production, Michelle Alexander and Valoneecia Tolbert excel at portraying both sides of these women, mostly coming off as the kind of chatty best friends that anybody would want to have, but also not shying away from exploring the characters’ snobbish sides nor, more importantly, the thoughts of depression and anxiety that are part and parcel of navigating the world as a single black female.

Director Matrex Kilgore keeps up a rapid pace to the show, assisted by a utilitarian scenic and lighting schema by Gary Thornsberry and Sydney Rhiannon Smith, respectively, along with video projections designed by Lowell Bartholomee. Kilgore and the design team know that this show is an actress’ vehicle, though, and keep the bells and whistles to a minimum so as to focus on the extraordinary job done by the two women as they take on various personas in short, skit-like scenes throughout the show’s two acts.

Though *Single Black Female* does show its age in a few places—as a play written before 2016, it doesn’t discuss the ways in which women of color are at greater risk of violence and hate crimes today than they have been for years up until now—the general themes of middle class black women looking for love and fulfillment still speak potently to today’s audiences. Rather than focusing entirely on the pain of that struggle, though, Thompson allows the play to embrace the restorative power of female friendship, creating a hopeful (and riotously funny) vision of black womanhood that is, indeed, singular.

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