

REVIEWS • Theatre • Dance

Whose Family Values!

Reviewed by Elias Stimac

Presented by Woodie King, Jr.'s New Federal Theatre, casting by Stephanie Klapper Casting, at the Clurman Theatre, 410 W. 42 St., NYC, May 22-June 30.

Richard Abrons tackles a variety of controversial subjects in his latest play, "Whose Family

Values!" The show starts off quietly, but by the final curtain, a series of time bombs has exploded in the upscale St. Louis home of Charles and Pat Boyd.

At first, the Boyd family appears to be quite functional—a rarity in dramas these days. But they do have a son who left home to pursue a career in social work on the West Coast. And they have an African-American housekeeper who waits on them hand and foot. And Dad gets a mysterious call in the night, requesting his participation in or approval of a potentially dangerous demonstration. That's when all hell breaks loose.

It turns out that Charles (Herbert Rubens), Pat (Glynis Bell), and their son Steven (Kevin Rolston) frequently protest at a local abortion clinic. Steven's fiancée (Jennifer Laine) also learns that the father is racist, and absent son Bruce (Chris Hutchison) left because he didn't share his family's extreme beliefs. Only after a fatal explosion, a life-threatening stroke, and the arrival of Bruce's outspoken black girlfriend (Rosalyn Coleman) does the family begin to mend its wounds—and its ways.

Philip Rose has staged Abrons' unsettling story with tension, grace, and wit. Together they have fashioned a contemporary social drama along the lines of Odets, offering both sides of reasoning on the topics being debated. Their ensemble cast works well together, with Rubens as the opinionated patriarch, Hutchison and Coleman as the outspoken interracial couple, and Gammy L. Singer as the family cook giving the most compelling portrayals.

The living room set by Robert Joel Schwartz is impressive, with a marble staircase and upscale furnishings. Shirley Prendergast lights the play with a delicate touch, and Sean O'Halloran adds the nicely muted sound effects. Costumes by Gail Cooper-Hecht are casual and comfortable.