



“Black Pearl Sings!” Deftly Explores Origins of Song and Self

by [SUSIE POTTER+](#) • FEBRUARY 10, 2015



[Theatre in the Park's](#) “Black Pearl Sings” stars Rozlyn Sorrell (left) and Lynda Clark, Feb. 6-8, 12-15, and 20-22 in its Ira David Wood III Pullen Park Theatre (photo by Curtis Brown Photography)

Black Pearl Sings!, onstage now at [Theatre in the Park](#), is a heavily fictionalized account of the work of ethnomusicologists John and Alan Lomax, who worked tirelessly to collect songs from the past for the Library of Congress. Representing the Lomaxes in female form is the beautifully developed character of Susannah, portrayed by [Lynda Clark](#), who is also the show’s director. Susannah ventures into a prison- one of the best places for collecting old songs- and finds Pearl Johnson ([Rozlyn Sorrell](#)). Pearl is serving a sentence for killing a man- a killing that the script subtly justifies based on his implied actions against her daughter. It is that daughter, now grown and somewhere in the world, and the hope of finding her that makes Pearl agree to help Susannah by sharing some of the songs of her people.

Over the course of their regular meetings, the women’s relationship grows into a real friendship. The emphasis is on the word “real” here because their friendship is not the idealized stuff of sappy stories. Frank Higgins’ script may have only two on-stage characters, but they are fully realized, and their relationship is one filled with tensions, resentments, and, eventually, hard-earned respect for one another.

Susannah and her passion for song, through which she reveals snippets of historically fascinating information delivered in such a way that it never comes across as pedantic, is kind at heart but with her own secrets and bitterness tucked carefully beneath the surface. Clark does a wonderful job of bringing Susannah’s complexities to life and also nails the show’s comic moments. She is in good company with Sorrell, who shines thanks to her powerhouse voice and knack for making her character’s obstinance seem endearing. Their chemistry onstage is strong and intimate, often making viewers feel as though they’re simply sneaking glimpses at private moments the women share.

[Thomas Mauney’s](#) perfect lighting touches, combined with Clark’s costumes and [Mike Raab’s](#) detailed sets- one a fancy home and the other a rustic jail cell- all combine to make a strong show even stronger and more engrossing. The fact that all of these things are taken care of so perfectly allows the story, the characters, and the rich script, which explores identity, femininity, the search for self, and issues of class and race, the chance to shine in the brilliant way they deserve.

To detail all that happens in the second act would give too much of Higgins’ script away, but suffice it to say that the show never loses steam. It is emotional and multilayered without ever being too heavy-handed or losing its entertainment value. In short, *Black Pearl Sings!* is an absolute must-see, and the two characters presented therein are sure to stay with viewers long after the curtain closes.

[Theatre in the Park](#) presents **BLACK PEARL SINGS!** at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 12-14, 3 p.m. Feb. 15, 7:30 p.m. Feb. 19-21, and 3 p.m. Feb. 22 in the Ira David Wood III Pullen Park Theatre, 107 Pullen Rd., Raleigh, North Carolina 27607.

TICKETS: \$28 (\$22 students, seniors 60+, and active-duty military personnel), except \$20 per ticket for groups of 10 or more.

BOX OFFICE: 919-831-6058 or <http://www.etix.com/>.

INFORMATION: 919-831-6936.

GROUP RATES (10+ tickets): 919-831-6058 or <http://theatreinthepark.com/whatson/group-sales>.

SHOW: <http://theatreinthepark.com/calendar/event/44> and <https://www.facebook.com/events/1607051049528897/>.

PRESENTER/VENUE: <http://www.theatreinthepark.com/>, and <https://www.facebook.com/theatreintheparkraleigh>, <https://twitter.com/TheatreInPark>, and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre_in_the_Park.

DIRECTIONS/PARKING: <http://theatreinthepark.com/visit/how-to-find-us>.

MAP: <https://maps.google.com/>.

NOTE: All shows are wheelchair/walker accessible, and large-print playbills are usually available.

OTHER LINKS:

Frank Higgins (playwright): <http://www.dramaticpublishing.com/AuthorBio.php?titlelink=10085> (Dramatic Publishing bio) and <http://www.doollee.com/PlaywrightsH/higgins-frank.html> (Doollee.com: The Playwrights Database bio).

Lynda Clark (director): <https://www.facebook.com/lynda.clark.92> (Facebook Page).

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Susie Potter is a Raleigh, NC-based freelance writer and editor. She is a 2009 graduate of Raleigh's Meredith College, where she majored in English. She holds graduate degrees in teaching and American literature from North Carolina State University in Raleigh. In addition to her work for **Triangle Arts and Entertainment**, she is an award-winning author of short fiction. Her works have appeared in **The Colton Review**, **Raleigh Quarterly**, **Broken Plate Magazine**, **Big Muddy: A Journal of the Mississippi River Valley**, **the Chaffey Review**, and **Existere**. To read all of Susie Potter's **Triangle Arts and Entertainment** articles and reviews, click <http://triangleartsandentertainment.org/author/susie-q/>. To read more of her writings, click <http://www.susiepotter.com> and <http://www.myspace.com/susiepotter>.