

'Race' at Dragon Theatre raises hot-button issues

By Judy Richter Daily Journal correspondent Mar 23, 2018

Accused of raping a young black woman in a hotel room, a wealthy, middle-aged white man says he didn't do it and seeks legal help.

That's the premise for David Mamet's "Race," presented by Dragon Theatre Company.

The lawyers that Charles Strickland (Martin Gagen) consults are the low-key, white Jack Lawson (Pat Caulfield, the show's producer) and the more volatile, black Henry Brown (Dorian Lockett).

After talking with him for a while, the two partners decide they don't want to take the case because they don't think they can win it. They're not concerned with guilt or innocence.

However, their young black associate, Susan (Hannah Mary Keller), assuming she's doing what they want, commits them to the case.

From then on, the two partners try to work the angles to defend him. They often answer his questions as well as Susan's questions with questions of their own.

Much of the case hinges on the red sequined dress that the victim said Charles ripped off her. In the end, it's not totally clear what a jury's verdict would be, but Susan knows what hers is.

In less than two hours, Mamet evokes issues of racism, sexism, ageism and class privilege. The sexism is most apparent as the two law partners keep

referring to Susan and the victim as girls.

Director Kimberly Ridgeway paces the action well, but she allows Henry to become so blustery that he seems to verge on violence. Otherwise, this production is effective.

Unlike earlier, 90-minute productions at American Conservatory Theater and San Jose Stage Company, this one has an intermission.

With its mature themes and language, "Race" is best suited for adults.

It continues through April 8 at Dragon Theatre, 2120 Broadway, Redwood City. For tickets and information call (650) 493-2006, Ext. 2, or visit dragonproductions.net.