

BACKSTAGE

THE ACTOR'S RESOURCE

REVIEWS

KRISTEN ANTHONY



Reich turns: Jamison Jones and Tyler Christopher in *Bent*

BENT at Theatre 68

Martin Sherman's harrowing 1979 drama

is timelessly relevant in its portrait of repression, persecution, and slaughter of citizens who are deemed undesirable by fascist governments. It zeroes in on the Third Reich's reign of terror against "pink-triangled" homosexuals, which was a lesser-known aspect of Hitler's reign. Director Crystal K. Craft's rendition fully captures the play's heart-wrenching power, highlighted by two masterful lead performances.

The hard-hitting narrative—often painful to watch—explores an unusual relationship that develops between Max (Tyler Christopher) and Horst (Jamison Jones), two inmates in a Nazi

**CRITIC'S
PICK**

concentration camp. The story begins when Max has a fateful dalliance with a gay youth (Andrew Miller), who is tracked down to the home of Max and his lover Rudy (Stephen Kline) and murdered there by Nazi soldiers. The soldiers subsequently capture the fleeing Max and Rudy. In a train en route to the camp, the soldiers force Max to beat Rudy to death. At the camp, Max and Horst form a bond that offers them intermittent escape from the futility and horrors of their situation. Their resourcefulness in finding ways to defy the guards and mutually express their love results in two remarkable scenes, followed by a shattering conclusion.

As a character who at first seems to react stoically to having killed his own lover, Christopher fashions a finely nuanced portrayal of a man whose need for affection runs deep. Beyond

Max's courageous façade is fear and despair—brilliantly conveyed in Christopher's poignant and indelible characterization. Equally profound is Jones' emotionally reticent tough guy, gradually softened by Max's compassion and subtle romantic overtures. When Horst's determined resilience gives way to animal-instinct terror at the hands of the ruthless guards, the tragedy of the circumstances hits us like a blow to the solar plexus. Kline gives a splendid performance as the flighty, doomed boyfriend and Rick Schiaffo scores strongly in a brief appearance as Max's supportive gay uncle. Craft and her company breathe vibrant new life into this unforgettable classic.

Presented by 68 Cent Crew Theatre Company and Ronnie Marmo at Theatre 68, 5419 Sunset Blvd., Suite D, Hollywood, Fri.-Sat. 8 p.m., Sun. 3 p.m. Jan. 19-Mar. 4. (323) 960-7627. www.68centcrew.com.

Reviewed by Les Spindle