

Theatre Review: 'Red Devil Moon' at FringeNYC

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By Jacquelyn Claire

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The cast of "Red Devil Moon." Photo Credit: Steve Walsh.

I get goose bumps all over again just thinking of the rousing musical anthems of "Red Devil Moon." Pam Ortiz—you made music that seduces every cell and shakes your firmament! With the final number "Raise High Your Voices," I thought the whole roof might lift off the Clemente to reveal a celestial meteor shower.

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But let's start at the beginning. Sugar Cane Productions presents a "concert" style version of this new musical. One narrator, seven musicians, and three singers poured out onto the stage like boiling cane sugar—they were hot and delicious, and you wanted to bottle them to be able to sweeten your pancakes in the morning! From the first notes of the epic "Pilgrim Train," I knew from my nodding head and tapping feet that I was on a magical ride straight into the heart of Southern Georgia.

It's the 1920s, during the sugarcane harvest in the harsh Jim Crow South—and against the backdrop of smoldering tensions between sharecroppers and landowners, a love triangle threatens to light a roaring veld fire that will fuel a Great Migration.

Louisa (Karen Somerville) is in love with two men. Her dependable, childhood sweetheart, Big Boy (Lester Barrett Jr.), and Bob Stone (Philip Dutton), the wealthy white suitor who whisks her away on luxuries and lifestyle. But she is going to have to choose.

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The narration is based on Robert Earl Price's book, which is in turn based on Jean Toomer's seminal Harlem Renaissance novel "Cane." The poetic phrases set the scene for each new development, and Earl Price delivers each sentence like a resonant, atmospheric lullaby.

Pam Ortiz is the composer and lyricist of this original, provocative, and colossal work. Every song hits a pain spot in your synapses and makes you feel the emotion deeply, right under all the subcutaneous fat, right to the bone.

The company comprised the three members of the singing group "Sombarkin" and "The Pam Ortiz Band," with special guests Ray and Tom Anthony. They all journeyed from Chestertown, Maryland and brought with them a breath of fresh air.

Every scene had an artwork or photographic image projected onto the screen to give a sense of the environment. The narrator spun gold with his enchanting wordplay, and then the moonlight oozed out of the musicians.

Karen Somerville, Lester Barrett Jr., and Jerome McKinney opened their mouths and their souls flew out to meet our open hearts. The sound vibrated my chakras and left them spinning in bliss.

Pam Ortiz (guitar), Ray Anthony (drums), Tom Anthony (bass), Philip Dutton (piano), Bob Ortiz (percussion), Nevin Dawson (violin), and Ford Schumann (guitar) made music to connect you to the Earth's core—grounding and molten hot. I can still feel some trapped notes rattling around my solar plexus that seem to be a version of "The One We Choose," which had me choking back a few escaped tears.

I can't wait for the full length musical version—and especially the cast album, which will be on repeat for a good long while.

Running Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes, with no intermission.

"Red Devil Moon" played through August 20, 2016 at the Flamboyant Theater at the Clemente as a part of FringeNYC. For more information on the show, click [here](#). For more information on FringeNYC, click [here](#).