

Introducing: Gregg T. Daniel



Ulato Sam, Ahkei Togun, Cedric Joe and Jonathan P. Sims in "Kill Move Paradise" by James Ijames. (Photo by Cooper Bates)

Daz (Ahkei Togun) rushes up a white ramp, repeatedly. He runs up the center, the left side and the right side. We watch his panic set in, erupt and dissolve into acceptance.

He's stuck.

In James Ijames' "Kill Move Paradise," Black men find themselves stuck in an in-between similar to purgatory after their death by police brutality. There's not much in this nondescript place between life and the afterlife. There's a giant ramp, an electric fence keeping them in, a printer and an audience (AKA you). When a young boy arrives, the group must navigate how to move forward and find a solution to their communal suffering. While directing the play, Gregg T. Daniel constantly returned to Ijames' play notes which shared how "Black people are often looked at, but very rarely seen."

This is shown immediately as Isa (Ulato Sam) looks at the audience and realizes they are simply there to watch. For Daniel, it reflects the reality of seeing the murder of George Floyd on television. It brings up questions about how and when people see the Black community.

The ramp epitomized the non-naturalistic form of Ijames' play. It plays a big part in the narrative as their fight against it reflects their fight for agency. It's a physicalization of their struggle.

“They try again and again, several of them try repeatedly to get out of there as if they can climb high enough to escape white society or the white gaze,” Daniel said.

They try different ways up the ramp. They extend their bodies. They run. They leap. They go up the side. They try to climb around.

“Sometimes, I was moved to tears,” Daniel said. “It’s rigged. It’s not made for you to get out that way.”

The play’s absurdity expands beyond the set. The actors are challenged to blend genres. The group of four transforms into aliens and alters the environment into the household of a sitcom.

“We just had to always make sure they’re trying to understand their situation [in each realm] and maybe get out of their situation,” he said.

When the youngest of the group, Tiny (Cedric Joe), finally realizes the truth, the weight of the play sinks in. Tiny was shot and killed by a police officer because he was holding a toy gun, similar to Tamir Rice who died at the age of 12.

“We’ve had many nights where we just broke down,” Daniel said. “It was healthy, but it was also the larger question of, ‘Why does this violence continue to be perpetrated?’”

Throughout “Kill Move Paradise,” names are spit out of a printer on stage. These names are of Black and brown people who were killed by the police. It’s all part of Ijames’ methodology. If more people are killed, they are added to the list, per Ijames’ request. On opening night, the production added two more. As the [list of names grows](#), so does the weight of Ijames’ story.

“It was fun, but it was also very difficult emotionally to realize that this is the world Black and brown people live in, and they’re often looked at but not seen, not at all,” Daniel said.

As we begin to see these names as fathers, mothers, cousins, aunts, uncles — family — then can we create “permanent change,” Daniel said.

You can see the play until November 3 and Odyssey Theatre will have a special “Black Out Night” on September 27.

LOCATION: 2055 S Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90025

DATES: September 11 - November 3

TIME: 8 pm Wed. thru Sat., 2 pm Sun.

PRICE: \$20 - \$40

LINK: <https://odysseytheatre.com/whats-on/kill-move-paradise/>