



PHOTO BY DANIEL HEDDEN

Egan Paul Davson, left, and C.F. Jarmon star in African Globe TheatreWorks' production of "The Piano Lesson" at Newark's Symphony Hall.

Shepard battling

NEW YORK STAGE

The Late Henry Moss

Where: Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St., New York
When: Through Nov. 4; 8 p.m. Saturdays; 3 p.m. Sundays
How much: \$55. Call (212) 2 www.signaturetheatre.org.

BY MICHAEL STAR

NEW YORK — Imagine "West" reuniting to bury the piece together his bizarre fin

That's more or less San Henry Moss," his new Off-B day. Despite a scrupulously Theatre, Shepard's study c wounded sons never really c

Still, major fans of Shepa mas should find the piece c keep them reasonably inter hour length.

Each of the work's three figure (Guy Boyd) madly d sey), a robust Mexican stran control, and every time the rundown house in rural New

There's where Henry di and Ray (Ethan Hawke) fin flashbacks as a neighbor (J Middleton) relate their stor hood to different degrees, ti recreate their parents' abusi

As the play reveals, H doomsday under Conchalla thing bad is happening to r angle! Sons! Neighbors! We How's a man supposed to how Henry died before he ce

Conscientiously wrought of typically pungent express somebody puts it here — an fallout of domestic violence the drama often flags and earlier Shepard works, and catharsis in its conclusion.

Perhaps others will stag timable Joseph Chaikin, wh fully Shepard-by-the-numbe unearthly blue lighting and matic underscoring by a mu can and Native American it proves to be more distractin

A splendid comic actor, speakable Henry, and his bl against the show. Howard brother role, but Hawke is learns something valuable a luring as the spitfire who tal



Now playing

Troupe hits all the right notes in 'Piano Lesson'

NEW JERSEY STAGE

The Piano Lesson

Where: African Globe TheatreWorks, Symphony Hall Second Space, 1020 Broad St., Newark

When: Through Oct. 7. Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m., Sundays at 3 p.m.

How much: \$10 Fridays, \$20 other performances. Call (973) 624-1584.

BY PETER FILICHA
 STAR-LEDGER STAFF

For "The Piano Lesson" at African Globe TheatreWorks in Newark, Daniel George plastered the walls and door frames of his set with faded pictures of the black man's past, from a solitary but stalwart Booker T. Washington to a miserable mass of chain gang prisoners. It sets the tone for the August Wilson drama, which questions whether African-Americans should let their past melt away, or keep it with them at the risk of their future.

"The Piano Lesson" is part of

ited: an heirloom piano, carved with impressive pictures of his forebears by an ancestor. An antiques dealer wants the instrument, and Boy Willie is ready to strike a deal.

But Berniece, a widowed mother who could use the money, refuses to sell this work of art. Her family's history is carved on a unique item that could not possibly be replaced.

Going back centuries to "Julius Caesar," when audiences took Brutus' side — then changed their minds when hearing Marc Antony's speech — so, too, have contemporary audiences empathized and agreed with Berniece's point of view, then Boy Willie's. Should one hold onto the past for the sake of sentiment, or should one move forward, even at the expense of sacrificing memories?

Any production of "The Piano Lesson" rests on the shoulders of the actors portraying Boy Willie and Berniece, and there are strong ones here. Egan Paul Davson is a force of nature, his eyes continually

Boy Willie brings "nothin' but trouble and a whole lotta mouth." She demonstrates that she can be a loving mother, and, in time, someone who wants to be loved by another man.

The rest of the cast is just as potent. As their uncle, C.F. Jarmon is an eloquent voice of reason. Rodney Gilbert is amusing as a prissy elevator-boy-turned-evangelist, who wants to be Berniece's suitor. Penrod Parker is a family friend who has a hilarious monologue about a man who thought he was Jesus. Jeff Lambert is earnest as Lymon, Boy Willie's pal who'll help him move the piano. Keisher Glymph is fun, first as Boy Willie's pickup, then as Lymon's. And though Najah A. Johnson is only a second-grader, she makes a remarkable debut as Berniece's 9-year-old daughter.

The play is nearly three hours long, but Eric Ruffin's excellent direction moves the action briskly.

Fans of African-American theater may lament that this is the second consecutive season that Crossroads Theatre Company in