

PICK OF THE WEEK: THE OLD SETTLER

Ed Krieger

Crystal Garrett and Jolie Oliver in *The Old Settler* at the Pico Playhouse

John Henry Redwood's bittersweet romantic comedy is set in 1943 Harlem in the comfy home (a handsome set by Thomas Brown) of middle-aged sisters Elizabeth (Ruby Hinds) and Quilly (Jolie Oliver). Elizabeth is dignified and restrained, while her sister is outspoken and nit-picky. These church-going ladies are often like oil and water, but there's an unmistakable sisterly love and devotion that underpins the acrimony. Their bond is tested when Elizabeth decides to take in as a renter the handsome, ultra-countrified Husband Witherspoon (John R. Davidson). He's come up from the South looking for his sweetheart, Lou Bessie (played with sass and attitude by Crystal Garrett), who is only interested in a good time and the man's money. It isn't long before Husband and Elizabeth are tenderly eyeing one another. The story of a May-December romance is an old one, but it receives a charming and inventive treatment by Redwood, and also offers a sobering glimpse into the pre-civil rights-era African-American experience. The outcome is predictable, but this doesn't detract from what is a thoroughly enjoyable production with emotionally vibrant performances under the direction of William Stanford Davis. Pico Playhouse, 10508 W. Pico Blvd., W. L.A.; Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 3 p.m.; through Oct. 27. (323) 960-7712, plays411.com/oldsettler (Lovell Estell III)