

'Deep Are The Roots' Still Important Play

By JESSE H. WALKER

We understand that some folks questioned the revival of "Deep Are The Roots," the 1945 Broadway hit about a Negro soldier's return to the Deep South and his inability and outright refusal to accept the old "status quo."

We are not one of those. We think the production now showing off-Broadway at the St. Marks Playhouse is as important today as yesterday. Especially so, what with day by day news events graphically showing that the anti-bellum south still refuses to give up.

"Black is black, and white is white," Gertrude Jeannette, who plays the loyal mother, says to her son, Lincoln Kilpatrick, the returning Negro lieutenant. And such remains the case in the minds of the anti-sit-ins and anti-Negro voters today, and, to them never the twain shall meet.

Wonderful Company

A wonderful company is seen in this revival of the Arnaud d'Usseau and James Gow play. Loretta Laversee is appealing and beguiling as the young white girl who finds that she and her young Negro childhood friend are in love.

Janet Ward is excellent in her role of the white benefactor of the Negro lieutenant who is confused when her liberal intentions meet headlong with her Southern instincts.

James Karen as the northern liberal in love with Miss Ward and Mark Gordon, with the humorously thick southern drawl as the self-important budding politician are extremely convincing.

Other excellent characterizations are given by Edwin Cooper

as the old time Senator Ellsworth Langdon, and Beverly Todd in the unsympathetic role of the upstairs maid.

Mr. Kilpatrick gives a strong performance in the role of Lt. Brett Charles, the role enacted on Broadway by Gordon Heath and Miss Jeannette, an alumnus of the American Negro Theatre, has several dramatic bits that draw spontaneous applause.

Played in the semi-circle St. Marks Playhouse, this production of "Deep Are The Roots," to these eyes, is as shocking as ever as it dramatizes the impasse still prevalent in the South between Negroes seeking social equality and the "over my dead body" reactionary Southerners.

Nothing was more up to date than the shock expressed by the Southerners when they learned Lt. Charles had had the effrontery to enter the front door of the public library to borrow a book.

Such incidents are making front page news daily. There's nothing dead about this vital play. It's still today's history.