

VOICE

the village



Blues dues:
Lewis and Mambo
in *Hoodoo Love*

Jaisen Crockett/Art Meets Commerce

Sightlines

Hoodoo Love

By Katori Hall
Cherry Lane Theatre
38 Commerce Street
212-239-6200

If living poor in the 1930s Mississippi Delta wasn't enough reason for a young African-American woman to sing the blues, the determined Toulou (Angela Lewis) finds a few more in the course of Katori Hall's *Hoodoo Love*. Her man, a blues guitarist called Ace of Spades (Kevin Mambo), hops midnight trains to far-off gigs and openly enjoys the company of other women. Her religious but abusive brother Jib (Keith Davis) freeloads for months at a time. Toulou's only friend is Candy Lady (Marjorie Johnson), who lives next door and offers folk wisdom and spell-casting potions. But even expert mojo doesn't always work as planned. Through suffering, Toulou ultimately acquires the experience-ravaged blues voice she needs to leave for Memphis.

Hall's ear for unusual language makes her a new writer worth watching. And this debut play,

part of the Cherry Lane's Discovery Series, has several evocative moments — especially when it delves into hoodoo, an African-American folk magic, which Hall uses to conjure her drama's most compelling scenes. In other places, however, *Hoodoo Love* lumbers along a little like one of the freight trains the characters hear in the night, overloaded with themes from slavery to music to magic. A hardworking cast — anchored by Lewis's focused performance — builds characters from the dialogue's regional flavors. And although *Hoodoo Love* overstretches scenes, Hall undoubtedly has many promising ideas secreted away in her playwright's mojo bag. In future plays, the full contents may be revealed. TOM SELLAR