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## On the Culture Front: Strong Island, Summer Shorts and more

Before the US Open began, Rafael Nadal and Venus Williams faced off against each other in a friendly game of badminton at the Lotte New York Palace Invitational. After hors d'oeuvres were passed and gin and tonics quaffed, the two champions took the stage, er, court. Williams wore a floral romper while Nadal sported jeans and a long sleeve white button down shirt. They didn't break a sweat as they coolly volleyed the birdie. There was frequent laughter and not a hint of competition throughout the match which Williams ended up taking. She ended up losing in the semi-finals and Nadal won the Open, so I guess as goes badminton doesn't necessarily go the US Open. Who would have thought?

The mini-play festival dubbed Summer Shorts had an especially strong lineup this year. Broken down into two evenings (each containing three short one-acts), The plays incisive, concise and often deeply funny. Melissa Ross' "Jack" focused on a couple struggling to let go as they make plans to bury their dog. On the surface, the dialogue can read as a constant volley of quips but Ross has a knack for organically weaving in subtext into the lightest exchanges. Alan Zweibel's "Playing God" imagines a comically vengeful God who comes down to earth to mess with an arrogant doctor. My favorite though was the savage comedy of manners, "Wedding Bash," written by actors-turned-playwrights Lindsey Kraft and Andrew Leeds. Early on in the one-act, a character tells his newlywed friends that their destination wedding was boring, even selfish, after they won't shut up about how magical it was. An explosive argument ensues propelled by the downright giddy energy of voicing all the frustrations we've come to accept as inevitable. While it's probably not advisable to try this on your friends, it sure is fun experiencing it vicariously in the theater.

There's a tragic suspense that courses throughout Yance Ford's new documentary "Strong Island." It's similar to the terrifying unease that drives "Capturing the Friedmans" but with a more intense intimacy. The film, which is available to stream on Netflix beginning tomorrow, searches to resolve questions of her brother's murder – especially why the murderer was never prosecuted. The answers are largely unsatisfying and point to larger questions of race and equality that we have failed as a nation to fully address. Ford doesn't shy away from how the murder devastated her family and uses her lack of objectivity to lay bare the human cost of systemic injustice.