



Saturday, June 7th 2008

Standing Clear (Coffee Cup)

BOTTOM LINE: For anyone who rides the subway, we're all united by the absurdity of people in transit. Standing Clear is a funny and relatable glimpse into how people behave and interact on the MTA.

Any New Yorker knows the perils of riding the subway: the indecipherable announcements, the drummers who bang on plastic tubs, the guy who sings out loud to his iPod, the European tourists with the giant hiking backpacks. Though these experiences could obviously make for funny sketch comedy, Coffee Cup (a theatre company) manages to turn this material into a rather insightful 90 minute production. Standing Clear introduces a handful of subway regulars including a bickering married couple, a crazy guy (potentially homeless?) and a Nosey Nelly who talks to anyone and everyone. We see the interactions these people encounter and observe what happens when they're matched with other subway stereotypes.

My favorite moments in Standing Clear occurred when the storytelling turned from what was actually occurring on the train, to what was occurring in a character's mind. For example, the girl who is madly attracted to the guy by the door breaks into Meatloaf's "Paradise by the Dashboard Light." It's indulging to watch moments that you've thought about play out in front of you. I've personally always wondered what it would be like to have everyone on my car dancing to the music I'm listening to on my iPod.

This show is very much an ensemble piece, with five actors playing various roles throughout the performance. There is never a particular lead or main actor, just different vignettes involving a few of the characters. Using such a convention where there isn't one main focus allows fluidity of the moments and gives everything equal emphasis, exposing the audience to the human condition on the whole. The script was a collaboration as well, written by two of the performers, Ishah Janssen-Faith and Jack McGowen, with the assistance of the other three performers, Melinda Ferraraccio, Becca Hackett and Ben Holbrook. The five actors work well with each other and it seems as though they are all equally invested in the production.

Standing Clear is an entertaining play, with a message that resonates with its audience: people are weird and life can be annoying, but everyone deserves respect. Focusing this theme on interactions in transit is a relatable way to communicate the idea...and an amusing way to do so.

(Check out Standing Clear until June 21 at The Access Theatre, 380 Broadway at White Street, 4th Floor. Tickets are \$20 or \$15 for students (at the theatre only) and are available at www.smarttix.com or by calling 212.868.4444. Visit www.coffeecuptheatre.org for more information.)

The above photo was taken by Kemachat Sirichanvimol.