

An Affectionate Shout-Out to New York

Claudia la Rocco . New York Times , Late Edition (East Coast); New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y.]03 Sep 2007: E.3.

[ProQuest document link](#)

ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

This self-proclaimed "celebration of New York City" by the collaborative theater ensemble Mabou Mines does not inspire. It does not satisfy. It does little more than prompt head shaking at all the very hard work and passion that must have been squandered in getting it off the ground. (The permits alone!) All that effort, yet how very little payoff there is in this 90-minute musical, conceived and directed by Ruth Maleczek. Mabou Mines is heralded for its experimental bent, but "Song" feels like sentimental community art gone hopelessly astray.

Brooklyn's representative, Simotra Simone Houston, informs the audience that "Tupac's mama was the street," while the Bronx's booster, Elisa Bocanegra, proclaims, "Her wealth has always been her people."

FULL TEXT

Unless you live in Queens, there is something ignominious about having to travel to the Queens waterfront to see a tribute to the five boroughs. Tribute, schmibute -- what all New Yorkers desire in their heart of hearts is for other New Yorkers to admit the supremacy of their own boroughs. Especially New Yorkers who live in Brooklyn.

In fairness, though, you can't argue with the delightfulness of the setting: a barge on the waterfront at the Gantry Plaza State Park in Long Island City. And all would be forgiven if the theatrical work awaiting inspired thoughtful analysis of New York identities, or prompted rueful laughs of recognition, or satisfied on a sensual level. Or something. But "Song for New York: What Women Do While Men Sit Knitting" is not that work.

This self-proclaimed "celebration of New York City" by the collaborative theater ensemble Mabou Mines does not inspire. It does not satisfy. It does little more than prompt head shaking at all the very hard work and passion that must have been squandered in getting it off the ground. (The permits alone!) All that effort, yet how very little payoff there is in this 90-minute musical, conceived and directed by Ruth Maleczek. Mabou Mines is heralded for its experimental bent, but "Song" feels like sentimental community art gone hopelessly astray.

The work is structured around five songs, one for each borough, each written by a different woman and performed by another five women. Clad in Mary Heilman's byzantine concoctions of fabrics, patterns and sculptural elements (think of wings and shiny, removable panels), each singer has a go at it, accompanied by musicians and a chorus of singing men who clamber about and bang on the set's scaffolding like "Stomp" imitators. Apparently what women do while men sit knitting is impersonate real estate.

Brooklyn's representative, Simotra Simone Houston, informs the audience that "Tupac's mama was the street," while the Bronx's booster, Elisa Bocanegra, proclaims, "Her wealth has always been her people."

Susan McKeown, Manhattan's interpreter, asks: "How can the wind go extinct? It can't. The windy wind is always with us."

These bits of poetry are all sung. Staten Island, meanwhile, is given a fussy poem written by Imelda O'Reilly, involving invading soldiers, domestic violence and a sort-of Irish accent for Sophia Holman. The Queens homage provides a respite, in the form of the full-voiced La Tanya Hall, who zips through a harmless, jazzy number by Karen Kandel. Still, suffice it to say that such great New York poets as Frank O'Hara and Nas can rest easy.

It seems ungrateful to spurn such an earnest offering as "Song for New York." But it seems impossible that anyone who lives in one of that city's boroughs could devise such a simplistic, hokey response to such a varied, maddening place.

"We sing the songs that New York sings," a chorus member intones early in the production. If so, this New Yorker is ready for the suburbs.

"Song for New York" repeats Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday on the waterfront at Gantry Plaza State Park in Long Island City, Queens; free, (212) 473-0559, www.maboumines.org.

Illustration

PHOTO: I hear New York singing: La Tanya Hall and chorus in Mabou Mines's "Song for New York." (PHOTOGRAPH BY NAN MELVILLE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

DETAILS

Subject:	Musical theater; Theater -- Song for New York: What Women Do While Men Sit Knitting
Company:	Mabou Mines
Identifier / keyword:	Song for New York (Play) >
Publication title:	New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast); New York, N.Y.
Pages:	E.3
Number of pages:	0
Publication year:	2007
Publication date:	Sep 3, 2007
column:	Theater Review 'Song for New York'
Section:	E
Publisher:	New York Times Company
Place of publication:	New York, N.Y.

Country of publication:	United States, New York, N.Y.
Publication subject:	General Interest Periodicals--United States
ISSN:	03624331
CODEN:	NYTIAO
Source type:	Newspapers
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	Theater Review-Unfavorable
ProQuest document ID:	433675821
Document URL:	http://access.library.miami.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/affectionate-shout-out-new-york/docview/433675821/se-2?accountid=14585
Copyright:	Copyright New York Times Company Sep 3, 2007
Last updated:	2017-11-15
Database:	U.S. Newsstream

LINKS

[Linking Service](#)

Database copyright © 2021 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

[Terms and Conditions](#) [Contact ProQuest](#)