

DAILY @ NEWS

NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

MUSIC • MOVIES • THEATER • DANCE • ART

NEW YORK NOW

'Some People' a Rich Stage Tapestry

Hoch's one-man shows traces our common threads

By MARY TALBOT

Daily News Staff Writer

SOME PEOPLE. Written and performed by Danny Hoch. Lighting by David Castaneda. At New York Theater Workshop, 79 E. Fourth St.

IN THE CLOSING MOMENTS of Danny Hoch's ingenious one-man multi-character extravaganza, "Some People," the actor appears as a Jamaican rapper in dark glasses and thick string of beads, chanting a song called "We and Dem." In a smooth patois he delivers the rhyming parable about rich chickens dissing the poor birds out on the street: "De chickens say 'Dem birds barefoot cause dey so dumb.' Today, de chickens dead and de other birds flying in de sky."

Hoch doesn't aim to moralize, but after an hour of impeccably mimicking Latinos, African-Americans and West Indians, the rap sums up the show: We all suffer from the "we and dem" syndrome. In his pastiche of Haitian deejays and Puerto Rican banji-girls, Hoch sets up his stereotypical characters and then lets their individuality poke holes in our assumptions.

What makes "Some People" so affecting isn't simply Hoch's empathy and powers of imper-

sonation, but that he manages to leave the audience with a visual memory of 11 different people. We recall not a 22-year-old Jewish guy from Queens but a street-courier B-boy, a Polish handyman who grins, grunts and flaps his arms across the language barrier and a Puerto Rican man

•
Hoch leaves the audience with a visual memory of 11 different people.
•

mourning his son.

What most of us hear and remember only vaguely from our interactions in the melting pot, Hoch internalizes completely and compassionately — down to the subtlest gradations of accent and gesture.

But for a couple of exceptions, Hoch's characters are

benevolent, blending swagger and humor with a dose of profound confusion about the world around them. Floe, a motor-mouthed black free-styler can rhyme up a storm, but trying to explain his emotions for his girlfriend leaves him tongue-tied: "The only way I can describe it is like, remember last summer when we went to Action Park?"

Blanca, a riotous and sassy Puerto Rican girl, sympathizes with her gay, HIV-infected roommate but refuses to wear a condom with her boyfriend Manny. ("Dat's really weird, right?" she giggles.)

Hoch is at his best when he mingles his characters' humor with the edgy sadness in their lives: Bill, the utterly xenophobic white yuppie waxes frenetic about Muslims ("Ever wonder why they're all named Mohammed? It's a conspiracy!") and the "crackhead murderers" who are out to steal his Jeep.

And César, an elderly Puerto Rican man grappling for words to describe the death of his son, shows that Hoch's grace and insight can reach across generational as well as ethnic and sexual lines.



WE & DEM: Danny Hoch as a merengue dancer in "Some People"

DONA ANN McADAMS