

SPORTS FINAL

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THEATER REVIEW

Replaying Voices of the City

SOME PEOPLE. Solo by Danny Hoch, directed by Jo Bonney. Lights by David Castaneda. Joseph Papp Public Theater, Lafayette Street south of Astor Place, through Nov. 13. Seen at Friday's press preview.

By Linda Winer
STAFF WRITER

DO NOT BE FOOLED by the casual sort of generic title Danny Hoch gives his one-man show that opened last night at the Joseph Papp Public Theater. Hoch calls his dozen New York characters simply "Some People," but he knows exactly how special he wants us to know they are.

And so he is talking — really, really fast — as the voices and rhythms of the new immigrants from the Caribbean and Eastern Europe, as the street specialists from the lost continents of urban America.

He's inhabiting complicated individuals from populations more often mushed together as "those" people than articulated as real people and funny people and people with contradictions who basically mean well.

And, though he gets preachy at us by the end of the 90-minute piece, he is amazing at it.

Hoch — a 23-year-old Jewish kid from Queens — has gone from virtual nowhere to head-turning hotness in the year since an earlier version of "Some People" ran a few weekends at P.S. 122 last fall. He now has an Obie, national tours, a feeler from HBO, an offer to hawk a soft drink and a New York magazine feature announcing him as perhaps "the next Bogosian. Maybe better."



Photo by Paula Court

Danny Hoch, 23, finds characters' humanity.

The comparison to Eric Bogosian is tempting, especially now that Jo Bonney, Bogosian's wife and director, has staged this one. Both men wear black jeans and black T-shirts, both create motermouth city characters with minimal props and maximal intensity. Hoch even does some DJs who, at first meeting, can make you think of Bogosian's "Talk Radio."

But Hoch works a sunnier side of the street. Where Bogosian concentrates on low-life characters who seem unrelentingly incapable of change or (until recently) personal insight, Hoch seems drawn more to the sweetness in people, to the humanity beneath the bravura — to both the excitement and the grief of the street.

We believe him. At his worst — that is, toward the surprisingly shapeless ending and the in-case-you-didn't-get-it epilogue — his approach reminds us

that he also uses his drama to work with troubled teens in jails and high schools.

Far more often, however, he takes us effortlessly to the world where he grew up, the "half-condo/half-project buildings that you see all over Brooklyn and Queens" — the neighborhood he describes in the program as having "a hundred different languages, accents, cultures and foods," where "there was no real sense of prevailing 'white America' because nobody had ever been there."

Hoch has a long bony face with a fleshy Claymation nose and a gangly look that changes each time he takes one of the jackets or sweaters from the clothes line on stage. His body listens to him. And so do we.

Language is his gift, and the medium through which he channels his people. There's an ethnomusicologist in him and a psycho-linguist — or at least a mental tape recorder — because the pitch seems as perfect as the patter and the poignance. He can do the Spanish radio announcer and the Caribbean radio jock, the hip-hop boy (he raps "push-uh" with "Flatbush-uh"), whose college dreams alternate with you'-momma insults.

His Kazmierczack, the Polish handyman, can break your heart while cracking you up with his eager need to communicate. There's Blanca, the Puerto Rican girl with the gay black roommate and the boyfriend who suddenly wants to use condoms, and Cesar, the bereft father of a murdered son, embarrassed at the therapist his wife made him see.

Hoch's only real jerks tend to be white people. Give him some slack here. He is very young. ■