

The New York Times

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Theater in Review

■ The diverse voices of New York City, from one mouth ■ Questions answered about the gay life ■ A different route for Gulliver's travels.

Some People

Performance Space 122
150 First Avenue (at Ninth Street)
East Village

Written and performed by Danny Hoch; lighting design, David Castaneda; technical director, Sarah Sidman. Presented by Performance Space 122.

The astonishing gamut of voices that emerge from the mouth of one Danny Hoch, a fiercely talented 22-year-old from Queens, demand and deserve concentrated attention. In "Some People," his one man, 11-character show, Mr. Hoch takes a whirlwind tour of the Tower of Babel that New York City has become, isolating the dense, individualistic speech styles of people of widely disparate ethnic backgrounds.

He makes few concessions in diluting accents or explaining vocabulary for clarity's sake. Whether portraying a Latino disk jockey whose Spanish patter is laced with absurd-sounding American brand names, or a Polish repairman forced to rely on pantomime and a skeletal English vocabulary, he forces us to listen hard. The invisible interlocutors to whom Mr. Hoch addresses his monologues may not always understand what he's saying, but ultimately, he makes sure that we do.

What emerges is a performance of linguistic virtuosity, which shows various patois as both bridges and weapons in the daily struggle to communicate in an increasingly multicultural city. With a sociologist's specificity, Mr. Hoch locates the cadences and locutions that allow his often dispossessed-feeling characters to find a

protective, insulating verbal pattern — even, in the case of his inner-city rappers, a poetry — that brings an illusion of order to the confusion in their lives. In "Some People," language and world view are inextricably fused.

A rangy man with a long, elastic face that resembles the Joker's in the Batman comic books, Mr. Hoch fully inhabits his characters physically, and without condescension. Even in his one wordless sketch, as a hard-smiling television meringue dancer who drops his joviality with a thud between performances, he is mesmerizingly articulate.

Equally persuasive as a garrulous Puerto Rican woman trying to ignore the shadow of AIDS in her neighborhood and a white New Jersey news addict who is a fountain of paranoid misinformation, Mr. Hoch shifts into a quieter mode for the evening's dramatic high point: a surprisingly delicate portrayal of a grief-numbed Hispanic father who has recently lost his young son.

Mr. Hoch doesn't need the didactic song about "dem" and "us" that concludes his show, nor his sporadic moments of overstated dramatic irony. Indeed, this precisely detailed gallery of portraits requires no footnotes at all.

BEN BRANTLEY



Dona Ann McAdams/"Some People"

Danny Hoch in "Some People," at Performance Space 122.