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OPENING IN NEW YORK

Man of many parts in a N.Y. trait of mind

By MICHAEL SOMMERS

NEW YORK—Danny Hoch is a remarkable performer and he is drawing similarly remarkable audiences off-Broadway to see his solo show "Some People" at the New York Shakespeare Festival.

Look around and you won't see the usual demographic white-on-white masses of middle-aged-and-over theatergoers. Nose rings and lip studs and clunky workboots are the fashion. Black and Latino and other ethnicities are clearly here in good numbers. The median age is distinctly in the mid-20s.

It's a great audience for a young man who may well become a great artist in time. Hoch is only 24 years old and he's already a virtuoso. With a genuine edge. "This ain't no performance art," he declares, and his show sure ain't. Whatever, Hoch is definitely going to appeal to some people more than others.

Let's hope that individuals who never go to the theater because it says nothing to them will find out about Hoch and his show: It's a \$15 ticket that proves how a passionate performer can still touch hearts and minds of all kinds.

"Some People" is Hoch's gallery of New York characters whom he creates by donning a hat or a shirt or a set of earrings, transforming his rubbery face and lanky body into entirely different physical attitudes—and then speaking their language. The visual aspect is important to Hoch's work, but that pales in comparison to the ways in which his authentic instincts and chameleon voice express the mind-sets of some people you never see in theater—on the stage or in the audience.

There's the Caribbean Tiger, a fast-talking radio deejay with a genial reggae lilt as he chats up a string of tongue-tied callers from Brooklyn. There's Kazmierczack, an Eastern European handyman who confidently says "I fix" and does so even as he painfully makes conversation in pidgin-English and sign language. And Cesar, Hoch's moving portrait of an older Puerto Rican embarrassed to be talking to a therapist about the death of his only son.

My particular favorite is a hip-hop kid who's sporadically thudding out the rhythms of a rap song he's trying to write with his buddies; dreaming about the big time and the big bucks, swapping "you mama" jokes ("You mama so stupid she got stabbed in a shoot-out"), and shamefacedly mumbling about how his ex-girlfriend still means a lot to him. The audience favorite seems to be Blanca, a no-nonsense Hispanic chica with comically high attitude, a black gay male roomie given to wearing her clothes, and a boyfriend who suddenly wants to use condoms "one year nine months and 17 days" into their relationship.

A scarier teen character is Flex, who proudly wears five beepers and blindly reels off the brand names of everything he wants from life. He's savage and funny and will probably end up dead real soon. But Flex knows who he is, especially when he disses the guy behind the take-out counter: "Don't be trying to jerk me neither man... I said you a immigrant. You know what I'm sayin'? You no-American. I'm from here. This s— is mine. I'm American, man."

Sharply directed by Jo Bonney, with chiroscuro lighting from David Castaneda and trendy dance hall music for punctuation, "Some People" presents nearly a dozen such fresh characters in 90 non-stop minutes. Hoch's few white characters aren't quite as vivid as others, but that's because Jewish mothers and paranoid Jerseyans have been done before. Most times, though, Hoch crosses all the scary boundaries of color, class, gender and ethnicity with breathtaking ease and originality. Hoch is authentic whoever he does—and he's a marvel.

"Some People" is running in repertory with another show through Nov. 13. Performance dates and times vary. Your next immediate chances: This Saturday and Sunday at 3 p.m. and this Monday and Tuesday at 8 p.m. For additional schedule information call (212) 598-7150. All tickets are \$15. The New York Shakespeare Festival is located at the Public Theater, 425 Lafayette Street, just south of Astor Place.



Danny Hoch does 'Some People,' in his one-man show at the New York Shakespeare Festival