

REVIEWS • Theatre



Michal Daniel

"Well" and Good: Kenajuan Bentley (L), Saidah Arrika Ekulona, and Lisa Kron in Kron's "one-woman show with some other people in it."

Well

Reviewed by David Sheward

Presented by and at the Public Theater, 425 Lafayette St., NYC, casting by Jordan Thaler/Heidi Griffiths, March 28-May 16.

What exactly is a "one-woman show with some other people in it?" It's a piece of theatre that breaks all the rules and in the case of "Well," the first example of such a bizarre hybrid that I've ever encountered, it breaks your heart as well. Lisa Kron is the performer-playwright and she begins her work, now at the Public, much as she did in her previous solo play, "2.5 Minute

Ride." She addresses the audience directly and explains that the show is definitely *not* about her relationship with her mother, but that it will use said bond to explore a more universal theme.

Kron, a witty and warm actress who is also a founding member of the Five Lesbian Brothers group, plays herself in an autobiographical "theatrical construct," seeking parallels between her mother's pioneering efforts to create an integrated neighborhood in 1960s Lansing, Mich., and her lifelong debilitating, undiagnosed illness. The neighborhood got well, but her mother did not. Kron satirizes the artistic impulse to neatly categorize the events of life, but, in a deft display of playwriting skill, the elder Kron (played with humor and unflashy compassion by Jayne

Houdyshell) continually interrupts with messy, truthful details. Four other actors playing multiple roles likewise break the action of Kron's carefully laid-out plans, until mother and daughter confront each other.

Intellectual "constructs" are stripped away and raw insides exposed. Theatrical conventions are turned upside down and the eternal drama of parent and child is explored in a fresh and different way.

Kenajuan Bentley, Joel Van Liew, Welker White, and Saidah Arrika Ekulona make up the ensemble and all have moments to shine, particularly Ekulona as a schoolyard bully. Leigh Silverman's staging balances theatricality with verisimilitude so we feel as if we are simultaneously watching actors in a play and real people in a real situation.