



A 'MOTHER' OF A SHOW: (left to right) Randy Graff, James Lecesne, Mary Bacon (seated) & Saidah Arrika Ekulona in *Motherhood Out Loud*. Photo: James Leynse

Theater Review

***Motherhood Out Loud* sheds light on nontraditional areas of parenting**



MOTHERHOOD OUT LOUD

Conceived by Susan R. Rose & Joan Stein

Directed by Lisa Peterson

Through October 29, 2011

Primary Stages

59E59 Theaters

59 East 59th Street

(212-840-9705, www.primarystages.org)

By Scott Harrah

Motherhood Out Loud, a collaboration written by 14 playwrights, including such notables as Theresa Rebeck and Beth Henley, explores many well-known notions about motherhood (from labor pains to the loss of a child), but also sheds new light on nontraditional areas of parenting.

Shown in five chapters, "Fast Births," "First Day," "Sex Talk," "Stepping Out," and "Coming Home," the play starts out, in chapter one, with conventional tales of giving birth and bringing a baby home from the hospital. However, the show is at its best when it covers topics that really test a mother, particularly when a child shows signs of being different.

In chapter two's "First Day," Randy Graff is especially compelling in Michelle Lowe's segment "Queen Esther," about a mother discussing, with insight and sincerity, her young son's insistence to dress as Queen Esther for their synagogue's Purim pageant. While the story tells the obvious frustrations of a parent coming to terms with a young child's future sexuality, both the playwright Michelle Lowe and actor Randy Graff show why there's so much more to the issue.

Playwright Marco Pennette's "If We're Using a Surrogate, How Come I'm the One with Morning Sickness" tells of a gay father (James Lencize) having to act as both father (and, in a sense, mother) to his child, and has much to say about this unconventional aspect of parenting.

The stories making up chapter three, "Sex Talk," aren't anything extraordinary, but all highlight the tricky, awkward but incredibly requisite need for parents to educate their kids about sex. Whether you are a mother or father now or remember your own parents discussing this topic with you, it is sensitive subject matter regardless.

The best part of chapter four's "Stepping Out" (and one of the overall standouts of the entire show) is Jessica Goldberg's "Stars and Stripes" about a mother (Saidah Arrika Ekulona) who must face the tragedy of her military son's death in Afghanistan. Ms. Ekulona is often heartbreaking as she discusses the sad details of having to bury a child. This is a subject that certainly hits home for many families with children in the armed forces.

Chapter five's "Coming Home" features a brilliant story, "Elizabeth," by David Cale, about a man who moves back in with his mother after his divorce. The piece tells, in touching detail, how a son discovers that his mother is not just forgetful, but is slowly descending into Alzheimer's disease.

Not everything works in *Motherhood Out Loud*. Some of the stories seem mired in clichés about women shocked by all that they must give up once a baby is born. However, the segments with more substance far outweigh the weaker ones, and at just 90 minutes, the show never lags and manages to be ultimately thought-provoking. Director Lisa Peterson makes the numerous stories flow nicely and extracts some dynamic performances from the cast, all of whom portray multiple characters.

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