



THEATER REVIEW | 'EXIT CUCKOO'

Surviving the Mother-Nanny Divide

By ANITA GATES
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Lisa Ramirez has seen some bad stuff.

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Carel DiGrappa

Lisa Ramirez in "Exit Cuckoo," her one-woman show derived from her experiences working as a nanny in New York.

She moved from California to New York to become an actress. Instead of waiting tables to pay the bills, she became a "temp nanny" and found that the job took over her life. It also inspired "Exit Cuckoo," her funny, sad and satisfyingly complex one-woman show at the Clurman Theater.

It's too bad that the title "The Nanny Diaries" has been taken, because that's what Ms. Ramirez has written. The characters she plays include nannies from three countries, two upscale women who employ nannies, the head of a nanny agency and a displaced grandmother who has to make an appointment (with a nanny) to see her own grandson.

The issues are familiar: the nannies are heartbroken over being separated from their own children; the New York mothers, unhappy in their careers or trophy-wife roles, are heartbroken over missing milestones in their children's lives.

But Ms. Ramirez brings fresh insight to the picture, smartly revealing the characters' interwoven fates and fortunes and distinctive personalities. One of her finest creations is Fiona, a young Irishwoman planning to have an abortion, who says, "I can't believe you can get pregnant from sex that lousy."

The title refers to one character's observation that the cuckoo is the only creature in nature to gives up its young to have them raised by others. At Tuesday night's performance there was spontaneous applause when a character suggested that people bring up their own children. ("Quantity time is what children need, not quality!")

In a program note Ms. Ramirez expresses hope that her play will "encourage us all to look at motherhood in a new context" and begin a dialogue about "what it means to be a woman in today's world."

I couldn't see exactly who was applauding, but surely this dialogue should also be about what it means to be a man when it comes to child rearing.

The only male characters in "Exit Cuckoo" are a perfect gay couple who ask Lisa to take their baby to see Christo's "Gates" project in Central Park because it's a good way for him to learn about the color orange.

"Exit Cuckoo" continues through May 17 at the Clurman Theater, 410 West 42nd Street, Clinton; (212) 279-4200, ticketcentral.com.

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★★★★★ **Brilliant acting, brilliant play,** May 05, 2009

Reviewer: jillystod4

I just think this play is extraordinary. Rameriz is an extremely versatile actor and embodies some of the most memorable characters I've ever seen. The play itself sits at the very center of a hot topic -- child care in New York -- and Rameriz manages to bring out the issues in a unyielding, moving way, and even shines a light toward the solution, which luckily is quite simple. I think every woman and every parent should see this. Great work.

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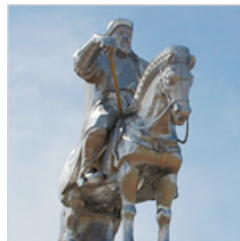
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