



EXIT CUCKOO

Lotus Productions at the Barrow Group Theatre as part of the Midtown International Theatre Festival

Viewed through the lens of her play, Lisa Ramirez hasn't met any women who are satisfied with their lives. Rich or poor, they are all struggling daily in a quest for love, money, meaning, or even simple understanding.

Her solo show *Exit Cuckoo* recounts Ramirez's experience as a nanny for wealthy New Yorkers. Through tightly drawn vignettes, she portrays women and children (oddly, no men) on all sides of this privileged world. Characters include a high-strung agency owner who places nannies with families; Salvadoran, Irish, and West Indian nannies, hardworking immigrants who spend more time with the children of the rich than their own; a self-medicated mother guilt-ridden at not raising her own child ("What kind of mother am I? I missed her first step"); and one wealthy child's grandmother, who wonders about the effect of these detached women giving their children to other women to raise ("Children need quantity care, not quality").

As a writer, Ramirez does a nice job in creating believable characters. You understand these women and the real issues they are dealing with. However, the play has some problems. First, every woman seems to be in existential turmoil. There's little counterpoint, which creates an oppressive feeling for the audience. Also, every character is somehow connected to another character, even if she meets the person randomly: In one case, a nanny describes a bad experience she's having with her employer. In the next scene, Ramirez by chance meets the employer, who recounts her side of the encounter. Once or twice is understandable, but this kind of coincidence happens again and again.

A more significant problem is that Ramirez doesn't have a good ear for accents—despite having Beth McGuire on board as a vocal/dialect coach. She never gets a handle on the Hispanic, West Indian, Irish, or Bronx accents. Instead, the people sound cliché, which drains several well-written moments of dramatic punch.

Special kudos to set designers Ji-Youn Chang and Lauren Rockman: Their superb backdrop is both functional and evocative.

Presented by Lotus Productions as part of the Midtown International Theatre Festival at the Barrow Group Theatre, 312 W. 36th St., NYC.

July 18–Aug. 9. Remaining performances: Sat., July 26, 8 p.m.; Sun., July 27, 2 p.m.; Thu., July 31, 8 p.m.; Sun., Aug. 3, 2 p.m.; Fri., Aug. 8, 8 p.m.; Sat., Aug. 9, 8 p.m.

(212) 279-4200 or www.ticketcentral.com.

Reviewed by Tom Penketh

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