



EVENSONG

Broad Horizons Theatre Company at TBG Arts Center

Mary Gage's documentary drama *Evensong* is as lovely as the Chopin played by pianist Marina Gabunia-Verriest to underscore the stories told by the six senior citizens on stage.

Evensong is heartening and surprisingly theatrical, thanks to the lively staging and intelligent interpretation of director Lewis Magruder (Broad Horizons' artistic director) and the riveting performances of an able cast. Gage intercuts the material smartly, with the characters, all on stage at once, interacting and commenting on shared themes. The stories are full of grace and grit.

Gwen (a charming Lucille Patton) is the privileged daughter of a Jamaican plant manager; she sees everything as "wonderful" and even laughs at impending blindness. Clay (the expressive Donald Grody) never forgave God for not giving him the sled he prayed for. Helen (the lovable Mikel Sarah Lambert, whose character, according to Gage, is a combination of two people) wanted to be a fashion buyer but found home economics the closest available subject in college.

Sue (the wry Pat Nesbit) nearly blew up her whole house in a fight with her drunken first husband, but she still sings the Sokol anthem he loved. (Sokol was a Czech and Slavic youth movement and gymnastics organization founded in the 19th century; the word means "falcon" in Czech.) Marie (an endearing Mary Ellen Ashley) is a first-generation immigrant and mother of 13 who milked seven cows before breakfast and boiled clothes by hand. In her opinion, "When you help somebody, the Lord says you don't help them; you're helping Him because you're doing it for Him." Duke (nobly played by Arthur French) was a dirt-poor black man who became a wealthy barbershop owner and put himself through college. "I had a hard life," he tells us, "but I wouldn't change nothing, and I'm glad I had it."

The melody of *Evensong* is a hymn to American elders.

Presented by Broad Horizons Theatre Company in association with Jack W. Batman at TBG Arts Center, 312 W. 36th St., NYC.

Aug. 11-27. Mon., Thu.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 3 p.m.

(212) 352-3101 or www.theatermania.com.

Casting by Jack W. Batman, Theatrical Consultants Ltd.

Reviewed by Gwen Orel

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