

'Fragments' tells Off-Off B'way story

By Matt Windman

amNewYork Theater Critic

Offstage: The East Village Fragments is a sequel to the fall's *West Village Fragments*. The show is an outdoor tour created by 17 directors and performed by more than 80 actors designed to introduce new audiences to forty years of Off-Off-Broadway theater that grew throughout the East Village.

Before the start of the show, the audience gathered around the cube in the East Village like a bunch of tourists waiting to explore the city. After ten minutes, an actress named "Mama" (a.k.a. Ellen Stewart, founder of LaMaMa) addressed us, describing how she spontaneously traveled downtown in the early 1960s with her "magic pushcart" and started a theater. We were then ushered from site to site, where troupes of actors performed scenes, monologues, poetry and mime in front of the audience.

The long list of represented playwrights includes Sam Shepard (*Rock Garden*), Charles Ludlam (*Conquest of the Universe*), Leonard Melfi (*Birdbath*) and Israel Horowitz (*The Indian Wants the Bronx*). When it was time to learn about *Hair*, the audience was ushered over to the Public Theater on Lafayette Street, where we met a group of anti-war protestors who asked us to sign petitions. Suddenly, a soldier began an altercation with one of them, and broke into "Where Do I Go."

As will be the case with any piece of environmental theater, especially one performed throughout the East Village on a busy weekend, the paying audience isn't alone in catching a glimpse of the action. Bystanders repeatedly gaze on, usually in a state of complete bewilderment.

For anyone interested in the Off-Off-Broadway legacy, *Fragments* provides an extraordinary opportunity to not merely watch a handful of scenes, but take part in an super-sized theatrical experiment that matches the raw, brilliant energy that gave birth to so much of the theater it means to represent.

The Cube at Astor Place, \$15-18, 212-352-3101. Thurs-Sat 7, 7:30, 8, 8:30pm. Thru June 30.



Catherine Porter and Nick Matthews
in Tom Eyan's "Why Hanna's Skirt Won't Stay Down."
Photo/Jim Baldassare