



Artsweek

Rhythm & Rhymes

Universe's "Slanguage" Showcases Slam and Slang Poetry

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Black History Month went out with a slang Tuesday, Feb. 27 with Universes' Universe's "Slanguage," presented by Arts & Lectures. Hailing from New York, the performance showcased Afro-Latin voices with a cast accomplished in alliteration and enunciation. The performance was loosely constructed around a subway ride in which from the Bronx to Brooklyn the audience experiences stops along the way revealing an urban underground. With text and movement the artists addressed the obstacles of poverty and assimilation. With the artists' use of verbose language, it was at times easy to get lost in the message of the performance but the immense energy of the artists never missed a beat. The show featured the talents of Steven Sapp, performer and founder of Universe, he pumped up the audience with his verbal splendors alongside master of flows and beats performance artist Ninja. As fellow cast member Mildred Ruiz boomed songs and Mtume Gant seized the audience with subtle humor.

When all four actors took center stage it was overwhelming. The effusive language took over creating confusion. However, when one or two actors were the focus of the piece, the words became more powerful, capturing the poetry and message of the performance. No individual performer stood out. The ensemble worked collectively to support and showcase one another's talents. As one performer would act out a piece, the rest of the cast would hum, drum or rhyme to present a story.

Each performer had the triple threat of being skilled at song, dance and acting, making up for the minimalist setup of the performance. The set was bare with only a few black boxes and a microphone, but the use of shadows, light and the vivacious movements of the performers decorated the stage. The program provided to theatergoers came complete with its own "Slanguage" dictionary and, from the looks of the predominately middle-aged and white audience, it was much needed. With word play like "Bubble Goose," "Jibaro," and "Muhong," the glossary was much appreciated for even students in the audience. The New York Theater Production may not have been throwing down rhymes to the right crowd - the show seemed more fit for the MultiCultural Center. What made this performance remarkable, however, was that it was able to draw out the audience. Responses of hollering and laughter could be heard throughout Campbell Hall. The performers were able to reach individuals who were not necessarily familiar with hearing gunshots in their neighborhood or coming from an American home where English is not their first language. Crowd members of all kinds leaving the hip hop theater event left revived and "aaight," ready to bust out their own "diddy-bop walk."