



The Side Project theatre company

reviews

butt nekkid

TIMEOUT CHICAGO - NOVEMBER 22, 2007

By Christopher Piatt

www.timeout.com/chicago/article/24418/butt-nekkid

On the time-sucking website Jamphat.com/rap, hip-hop and rap lyrics are comically quantified in visual form on bar graphs, pie charts and the like. On a quadrant with an x and a y axis, for example, x represents money and y represents problems; the line on the graph has a steady incline. Or on a pie chart labeled “Time spent being high,” the entire clip-art pie is a sterile blue; a key on the side tells us that blue stands for “All the time.” Even if you don’t know that the lyrics of Notorious B.I.G.’s “Mo Money Mo Problems” or 50 Cent’s “High All the Time” are what’s on the satirical barbecue spit, you still get the joke, a self-aware ironic contrast between pocket-protector math/geek science and gangsta rhymes. The context is high and smart alecky, but the appeal is broad.

In Laura Jacqmin’s *Butt Nekkid*, there’s a similar square-versus-street contrast. Her new play is about a white Jewish hip-hop mogul who gets hot under the collar when his daughter begins dating one of his rising African-American performers. The premise is as ripe and current as any new play in recent memory, but Jacqmin either has no working knowledge of hip-hop and the record industry or she doesn’t trust us to get what insider perspective she does have. The conversations

regarding everything from contracts to street cred to recording equipment are rudimentary to the point of distraction (despite Nick Keenan’s conversely with-it soundtrack). And her largely rote class-clash romance drama--none of it sounds like something you’ve never heard before in LoPiccolo’s by-the-numbers staging--misses both ironies and similarities of her characters’ opposing worlds. Jacqmin’s shown her wit and economy in *Sketchbooks* past, but *Butt Nekkid* comes off like Jay Leno trying to joke credibly about Jay-Z.





CHICAGO TRIBUNE - NOVEMBER 16, 2007

By Nina Metz

www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/northwest/chi-1116_th_fringenov16,0,5680106.story

Butt Nekkid (running off-nights at the side project) centers on a college-aged girl doing time in immatureland, but playwright Laura Jacqmin has trouble weaving together the disparate themes and storylines of her script.

Sarah is white. Lawrence is black. They meet at a record-release party in Los Angeles. They are both drunk. You know the rest.

Sarah's father, Marty (a bang-on Will Kinnear) runs a hip-hop record label where Lawrence is employed. A typical middle-aged white guy in the entertainment industry, Marty is a robber baron with the expensive-casual wardrobe of a man half his age. The character is hilarious and true.

Conversely, the insta-couple that is Sarah and Lawrence lacks credibility entirely. The dilemmas that arise - issues of religion, race, and an unwanted pregnancy - are clumsily handled, and the production (directed by Gina LoPiccolo) is cumbersome where it should be fleet.

It's too bad because Jacqmin has sharp things to say about music executives.

"I don't talk about money," Marty says during a negotiation. "Not here. Not in this office. That's what lawyers are for."

If only the rest of the play sustained that kind of insight and cutting wit.



CHICAGOCRITIC.COM - NOVEMBER 13, 2007

By Randy Hardwick

www.chicagocritic.com/html/butt_nekkid.html

the side project's penchant for bringing new works to their tiny black-box setting has resulted in some great small productions in recent years. Unfortunately their new show, billed as the world premiere of Laura Jacqmin's *Butt Nekkid*, will not be remembered as one of them. The show was developed at a playwrights' workshop last year and a portion of it was read in Chicago Dramatists' Resident Playwright showcase earlier this year. There are elements of the script that are quite good, but it is an unfinished work that suffers from being rushed to production in this extremely low-budget presentation.

Butt Nekkid is a contemporary romance that involves a young hip-hop producer and the 20-year-old daughter of the Jewish owner of the record-label he works for. There are some good beats from local hip-hop and theatre artist Idris Goodwin and the play's frank exploration of culture, race and religion is engaging. I came into the theatre totally prepared to like this play, but after a powerful opening scene, I quickly lost interest as the cast moved through what seemed like endless scene changes on the bare Side Project floor. There was so much moving of the few pieces of furniture that comprise Grant Sabin's non-set that even a more seasoned cast would have had difficulty recovering character from their cumbersome chores. Michael Pogue and Naomi Hummel each had some good moments as the young lovers, but the chemistry between them never rang true. The more experienced Will Kinnear was overall quite good as the manipulative record mogul dad, but he also dropped some lines on opening night which further contributed to eradicating the audience's suspension of disbelief. Being jolted into reality provided this theatergoer the opportunity to notice that others in the audience were equally uninterested.

Some credit is due the side project, however, for seeking out original and meaningful material. At \$12 in a space that doesn't seat 50, one cannot expect a lot in the way of production values and the cast certainly isn't planning retirement from this effort. If I were to see that another production of this play hits the boards a year from now, I would probably go because there is promise to the script. If you choose to see *Butt Nekkid* this time around, you might feel it's worth the meager admission, but if you do so, I suggest that you wait until later in the run because it wasn't ready opening night.