

January 16, 2007

[Off Broadway Review]

DAI (enough)*(Culture Project; 138 seats; \$50 top)*

A Culture Project presentation of a play in one act written and performed by Iris Bahr. Directed by Will Pomerantz. Lighting, Garin Marschall; sound, Frank Gaeta; production stage manager, Lisa Garvalitz. Opened Jan. 4, 2007. Reviewed Jan. 12. Running time: 1 HOUR, 20 MIN.
With: Iris Bahr.

By MARILYN STASIO

To ease the trauma of moving into a new home, people have been known to bring along the old coffee pot or a favorite toy. In making its big move to Soho, the Culture Project has packed up an entire production and reassembled the show intact in its spiffy new digs at 55 Mercer St. Not that there was all that much to move with “Dai (enough),” a provocative solo piece written and performed by Iris Bahr and set in a Tel Aviv cafe targeted by a suicide bomber. Aside from a few tables and chairs and a tricky lighting scheme, the key element is Bahr’s imagination.

Before Bahr became a fixture on “Curb Your Enthusiasm” and made her chops as a standup comic by appearing with Larry the Cable Guy, the Bronx-born performer lived in Israel, putting in two years of military service and earning the rank of sergeant.

With her dual Israeli-American citizenship and secular-Orthodox background, writer-thesp presents herself as someone uniquely positioned to explore the tragicomic faultlines of Israel’s disjointed national psyche.

The quirky central conceit of “Dai” (which sounds like “die” and means “enough” in Hebrew) is that a European journalist given the assignment to “look into the mind of the average Israeli” goes into a Tel Aviv cafe crowded with people and can’t find a single person who conforms to that norm.

“They’re all across the bloody spectrum,” she wails into her cell phone to her producer.

Among the specimens of humanity interviewed by this media diva (a brittle Christiane Amanpour clone in Bahr’s nasty perf) are an abrasive Israeli expatriate swanning through the old neighborhood on a quick visit from Manhattan; an idealistic American girl serving in the Israeli army; a cultured Palestinian professor; a hard-bitten Russian prostitute; a militant West Bank settler seething with a sense of entitlement; and an evangelical



Iris Bahr portrays diverse victims of a Tel Aviv suicide bombing in her play “Dai (enough).”

Christian bringing bags of money to “protect the Jews from harm until the battle of Armageddon,” when they will be incinerated.

They are, indeed, “a colorful bunch,” as the reporter puts it with a condescending sneer. But if these blatant individualists are the face of Israel, what does that say about the Israeli national character?

The only thing these people do have in common, as it turns out, is their collective death at the hands of an unseen suicide bomber. Helmer Will Pomerantz stages this horrific event discretely, even gently, with a separate slow-mo fade that captures each character just at the moment when he or she seems most alive. The killing irony is that the metaphorically fragmented Israelis are literally torn to pieces by an enemy that reduces individual human beings to a monolithic target.

“They’re all lost souls, the lot of them,” the journalist finally declares.

“I can’t tell if they’re arrogant and crazy or lost dreamers or both or neither. They’re all across the spectrum.”

Stuck as she is to the little tables and chairs that suggest the cafe setting, Bahr doesn’t put much body English into her characterizations. But there is a fine fire in her delivery, and she has more voices at her command than a symphony orchestra has strings.

Her well-tuned character sketches may not mesh as seamlessly as those in Sarah Jones’ “Bridge and Tunnel” (also a Culture Project venture). But their unfinished feel adds poignancy to a piece about the fragmentary nature of humanity.