

SHOW BUSINESS

The Original Casting Weekly for the Performing Arts

PEACHES

Written and Directed by
Cristal Chanelle Truscott
At P.S. 122
150 First Avenue
(Tel) 477-5933

Review by Steven Boone

What the great August Wilson has been doing over the course of several plays, many audacious young playwrights are attempting to pull off in one. Wilson dramatizes the African-American struggle for justice and equality in the 20th Century; each of his plays is a chapter representing one decade. But upstarts like Cristal Chanelle Truscott are time-travelling within each scene. Truscott's *Peaches* portrays the struggle as a horrible continuum. The syncopated wails and moans of field slaves resolves seamlessly into Marvin Gaye's "Sexual Healing," into Aretha Franklin's "Chain of Fools"—even into the theme for TV's *Good Times*.

This crazy quilt of monologues, songs, dancers and experimental outbursts follows the progress of black women from the cotton fields to their present world of confusion. The music sews it all together. Truscott and her four-woman (including herself), one-man cast segue from country blues to soul to pop as if singing one painful medley.

The pain, and Truscott's point, comes from the notion that the black female descendants of slaves haven't caught a moment's rest since the Middle Passage. Every woman in Truscott's ensemble is sick and tired of being sick and tired. After years of drowning her sorrows in song and sex, a blues singer tries religion only to find that it's just another empty promise; a young mother puts all of her hopes into her young son but is heartbroken to find that he is just as emotionally shattered by racism as she; a coterie of young women complain about the near-impossibility of finding love in a color stuck society.

We've heard it all before, and Truscott's genius is in acknowledging this while delivering a dazzling, "So what?" Through the force and virtuosity of her cast, she

argues that the Long Suffering Black Woman is a cliché only to the complacent and desensitized. To the women who, as one character puts it, "could never be careless," pain and loneliness almost define their lives. But in exploring the "almost" part, Truscott finds the balance and realism to make *Peaches* more than a simple tract.

Truscott, an NYU grad student from Houston, Texas, has assembled a brilliant cast of schoolmates. Each gets an opportunity to show off dramatic, musical and dance skills that rival any veteran of the stage. Elaborate, daredevil five-part harmonies collapse into strange solos and back again. Robert Stines, the only male in the ensemble, provides energetic support, though his singing is a lot more credible than his sometimes self-conscious acting. Portraying a black preacher and a jive-talking Jimmy Walker type, he digs only into the surface of the stereotypes, almost winking at the audience.

Truscott's cast is so young and so new that this essay-performance piece doubles as a talent showcase. It's as easy to picture this group touring as a neo-soul band as it is imagining Maiesha McQueen burning a hole in some movie screen. The stunts they pull off in *PEACHES* inspire that kind of corny well-wishing. But Truscott saves the greatest and subtlest trick for herself. In the play's most intimate and affecting monologue, she becomes a sweet, barely legal single mother who refuses to cave in to despair. Her performance and writing here are astonishingly vivid.

REVIEWS