



Indie Theater

By Barbara & Scott Siegel
October 3, 2003

Off-Off-Broadway is to the theater what the American independent film is to cinema. Whether it's on stage or on screen, we find young artists working with low budgets and unknown actors making art -- often, bad art. But Off-Off-Broadway, like the American indie, sometimes tosses up some pearls. The pearl at hand is Katie Pearl, who has lustrously directed one of this season's first great plays, *Anna Bella Eema* by Lisa D'Amour. As written, acted, and directed, the production is so organic and cohesive that it feels like a work of nature rather than a work of art.

At its simplest, *Anna Bella Eema* is about the relationship between mothers and daughters. You could call it a coming of age story, or you could call it a story for the ages. Either way, this galvanizing piece of theater deals with a 10-year-old girl, her extremely highly strung mother, and the efforts of the police to move them out of their home; they live in an otherwise deserted trailer camp where a stretch of the interstate highway is going to be built.

The play builds to a climax that features an explosion of magical realism, yet the work remains solidly grounded in the darkly comic here and now. D'Amour's script is a goldmine of emotional complexity, and this production's three actresses are surpassingly brilliant in bringing the play to life. Gretchen Lee Krich as the mother (and various animals) is ferociously talented; Monica Appleby, as her daughter, is remarkably versatile; and April Matthis as the Mud Girl, created out of dirt and water by the daughter, is a revelation. She also plays a giant policeman with great humor.

The performers create sound effects using small objects that sit on TV dinner trays in front of them. They also sing a cappella several times throughout the show, to stunning effect. And they act their asses off. The Obie Award-winning team of D'Amour and Pearl has created a thrilling and challenging piece of theater that, unfortunately, has just two performances remaining in its current run at HERE. *Anna Bella Eema* can be seen on Friday, October 3 at 8:30pm and Saturday, October 4 at 4pm.