



Entertainment :: Theatre

My First Time

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A scene from My First Time.

Dr. Ruth lost hers in a barn at a kibbutz. Ja Rule lost his in a stairwell in the projects. I lost mine in a roach-infested apartment in a two-family house. Where did you lose your virginity? If you care to share, you too could be a part of one of New York's best new off-Broadway plays: **My First Time**.

I knew even before the show started that I was going to like it. Billed as a "new play in the style of The Vagina Monologues, My First Time turns the real-life stories submitted by visitors to myfirsttime.com into a rousing evening of shared camaraderie. Some tales are achingly familiar in their awkwardness, some inspiring and heartfelt, some chilling and downright illegal.

You're greeted with a spartan stage, dressed only with four bar stools, a projection screen and an iMac. As you're serenaded with tunes the likes of Bad Company's Feel Like Making Love and Salt n' Peppa's Let's Talk About Sex, short bytes of other people's first times pop up on the screen (Dr. Ruth's and Ja Rule's were just two of them) and cool statistics about sex and virginity.

The audience is invited to fill out little blue cards with information about their first times, some of which are read as part of the play and all of which are used to calculate audience statistics, such as how many virgins are in attendance and the average age for the group's first times. There was only one virgin in the house on the night I went.

Then the actors take the stage. Bill Dawes, Josh Heine, Kathy Searle and Cyndee Welburn did a phenomenal job internalizing each character, drawing out the unique personalities that may or may not have written the original submissions (stories on myfirsttime.com are always anonymous).

Dawes and Heine juxtapose each other, with Dawes mostly taking the dominant and stronger male roles. I must say he does a flawless job going from the fire and brimstone born-again Christian decrying the Web site for its promotion of fornication, to a flirtatious young teenager exploring his sexuality for the first time with another guy.

Heine takes on more of the innocent, nice-guy stories, opening the show with the tale of a 15-year-old boy who went to Vegas with his dad and woke up in his hotel room to the unpleasant surprise of being straddled by a naked woman. His boyish looks and gentle voice make him a natural for these roles and he delivers performances that are both believable and moving.

Searle's performance runs the spectrum of female characters, from the perfectly played type-A, control freak type who ordered a guy she didn't really like to have sex with her, just to get it done, to the teenage girl who lost her virginity to her best girlfriend during a sleepover. She excels portraying the anal and snotty personalities,

reminding me of a younger Cynthia Stevens, but slides seamlessly into more reserved and sweet roles, some that are downright corny.

Welburn, however, gave what was probably the stand-out performance of the night. Loud and enthusiastic, angry and tender, her characters truly lived through portrayal of their funny, intimate and horrific experiences. She was vibrant when telling us about the beautiful moments she spent with her first lover and mournfully matter-of-fact when recounting the nearly forced times with a neighbor. Sweet, sassy and naive all in one, Welburn is the highlight of this overall fabulous play.

Make sure you head to New World Stages at 340 West 50th Street (between 8th and 9th Avenues) this summer to check out My First Time. The show is funny and poignant and an overall good time for anyone who can look at losing your virginity for what it is: just another first.

The show has an open-ended run, so hopefully it will stick around for a while. New World's basement theatres are very comfortable and cool, a great escape from the hot, humid NYC weather. Tickets start at \$25 and can be purchased through Telecharge.com or 212.239.6200. For more information about the play, check out www.myfirsttimetheplay.com.

Robin Kavanagh is a freelance writer based in NJ. She has written for numerous publications, including The New York Times, Asbury Park Press, Bergen Record, Parenting magazine, The Aquarian, North Jersey Media Group, and Blogcritics.org among others.

[Back to: Theatre » Entertainment » Home](#)

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