

FRINGE&PURGE**Hip Shot: *Open Hearts***Posted by **Sophia Bushong** on Jul. 22, 2011 at 5:00 pm**Goethe Institut- Mainstage****Remaining Performances:**

Saturday, July 23rd at 6 p.m.

They say: "Sadie is turning 90. 'Life is wonderful? Really? So where did everybody go? Living your life, it's like open heart surgery: a big annoying pain!'"



Sophia's Take: Sadie sits alone in her New York City apartment on the eve of her 90th birthday. What is the meaning of life at that age? How does one find purpose when most of your life is lived and behind you? These are not small questions and *Open Hearts*, written and performed by **Miriam Kulick**, offers no easy answers. Sadie's journey is at the core of the story, yet each of Kulick's six characters is searching for a type of fulfillment that is difficult to find; a purpose in life, the support of loved ones, and freedom. As the tagline—"Living your life, it's like open heart surgery: a big annoying pain!"—suggests, there is plenty of pain and annoyance to go around. The welcome surprise is that Kulick's play is more charming and hopeful than the quote, taken in isolation, suggests. She has infused humor and tenderness into each moment of her performance.

For the most part, Kulick moves with ease and clarity between the six roles. I am not entirely sure of the age of the character Greta, or her relationship to Sadie. Also, Kulick's transformation into the fix-it guy, Fernando, had me momentarily thinking he was a cleaning lady. However, Sadie's daughter Deborah, Deborah's lover Henrietta, and the refugee, Anwar, have entirely unique voices and bodies.

Director **Jeanette Buck** keeps the production simple and the staging grounded by what is motivating the characters. Kulick is wonderfully adroit at keeping up the pace, while adjusting her energy level to suit the emotional state of each person. Henrietta is as lively as Anwar is defiant, and Sadie can kvetch at the rate of a New York minute.

Billed as an hour, the show actually clocks in at more like 45 minutes, and could stand to be longer. Sadie has lived to the age of ninety, so mourning the loss of loved ones is inevitably a part of her story. Kulick offers a more thorough portrayal of a woman who misses her beloved sister and husband than of a mother whose child has committed suicide. I suspect Greta is Sadie's granddaughter, because she is certainly haunted by the specter of a woman who could not find reason enough to survive. I would happily have given the time required to watch Kulick delve into how the loss of a child might compromise Sadie's will to endure.

Though Sadie could be tempted further to close her heart to all that life can offer, her process of renewing her sense of purpose is delightful to watch. As Kulick would have it, the question of how we can continue to be of service to the people we love is always worth the asking.

See it if: You care to take in a short, sweet, thoughtful play—or are simply missing the cadence of New York City.

Skip it if: You want nothing to do with contemplating your own, or anyone else's, mortality.