

THEATER

La Próxima Parada

By Carmen Rivera
Repertorio Español
889-2850

It's difficult to do community-based theater about the dreary desperation of "the people" without sinking into the dreariness and taking the audience with you. That's why playwright Carmen Rivera deserves praise for *La Próxima Parada* (*The Next Stop*), a drama-comedy set entirely on a subway line that services Bushwick, Brooklyn. Anchored by the surly sweet charisma of Fátima, a single mother who has so much hurt in her heart she can't stop berating her loved ones, the play raises serious questions about faith, hope, and whether life in the big city ever gets better for the have-nots. Fátima is trying to catch the J train with her daughter Collette and cousin Denise so they can visit their men imprisoned at Rikers. Waiting through the long service delays, the women encounter Tony, a recovering drug addict, and a gauntlet of singing, rapping, and preaching panhandlers. The hilariously rowdy repartee between Fátima and Denise raises the banality of low-wage life to a giddy, celebratory level, enhancing the tragic edge to their struggle.

The play is a perfect time capsule of urban Nuyorican attitude circa 1999—this production, in Spanish with English translation, hits all the right accents. Director Michael John Garcés gets an amazing performance out of Lisa Zayas's Fátima, whose particular brand of brusque street wisdom is rarely portrayed in New York theater. Still, the play is in dire need of editing, and there are some rough spots where the actors' momentum comes to a screeching halt. But the feeling that no one really knows whether to believe in the future or to accept the misbegotten present is welcome relief from false happy endings.

—ED MORALES