

TimeOut

New York

November 1-7, 2012

Theater

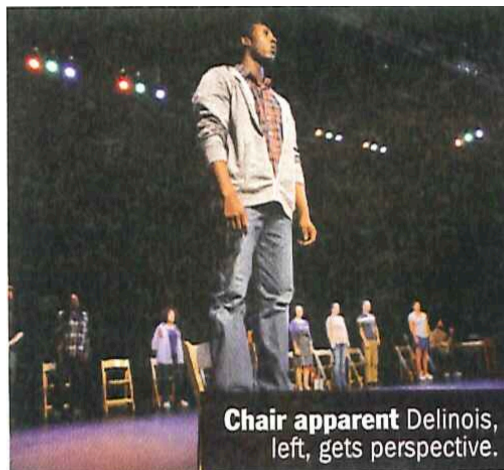
Neutral Hero



The Kitchen (see the Off-Off List).
By Richard Maxwell. Dir. Maxwell.
With ensemble cast. 1hr 25mins. No
intermission.

Remember how, early in Richard Maxwell's career, we laughed at his plays? By encouraging his performers (nonactors and experimental pros) to deliver lines in an expressionless drone with little movement, Maxwell created weirdly arid, stilted pieces that were both unnerving and unavoidably hilarious. Perhaps, in the late '90s, we were chuckling in that smug, urban, we-get-the-irony way. Then again, the plays (such as *House*, *Boxing 2000* and *Drummer Wanted*) were accessible tales of underdogs getting revenge or wallowing in defeat. The flattening effect of deadpan made the human struggle seem absurd, robotic. Well, no one's giggling now. Maxwell's latest, *Neutral Hero*, is bleached and desaturated to the point of being almost numbingly postdramatic. It's so dry and recessive, it makes his early experiments seem like realism.

Insofar as *Neutral Hero* has a narrative, it concerns Anonymous (Alex Delinois), a young man who goes on a Telemachus-like odyssey in search of his absent father (Philip Moore). Along the way, Anonymous



Chair apparent Delinois, left, gets perspective.

dallies with a couple of women, receives a beating at the hands of two masked strangers and breaks into haunting folk ballads with the rest of the ensemble. Since the language consists of blunt, elliptical dialogue and equally vague narration, it's hard to follow the basic action, which has the hazy elusiveness of a dream.

Maxwell keeps the stage almost totally bare, save 12 wooden folding chairs and scattered instruments for the cast to play (the musical arrangements are lovely). As his title indicates, Maxwell is aiming for both the blank and the epic. He hits his dual targets, and for longtime fans, the piece will be challenging but transfixing. And if laughter dies in your throat, that's because this restless, rigorous artist has moved on.—*David Cote*



November 1-7, 2012