

DAILY NEWS



City teens, acting out

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It's tough to get farther off the Great White Way than a gym at Chelsea's Covenant House, the outfit that helps shelter homeless and runaway youths.

But that's where teens from across the city are running through "AlieNation," which opens a three-day run Thursday at Lincoln Center's Gerald W. Lynch Theater at John Jay College (212-924-2167).

It's the fourth musical production for the New York chapter of City at Peace, a 10-year-old organization aimed at equipping teenagers to deal with violence and alienation.

In "AlieNation," a young narrator — "an immigrant living in a nation of immigrants," the new arrival calls herself — journeys with the audience through several narratives of physical abuse, domestic violence and rape, religious intolerance, suicide attempts and more.

The tunes are snappy, the choreography — by stage veteran Rozz Nash — is fly, and the stories, created and told under the guidance of artistic director Jeff Flowers by kids who've experienced them first-hand, are heart-wrenching.

Fran Motiwalla, a graphic designer with publisher Little, Brown, "bawled my eyes out" at last year's show. This year she's volunteering as an FAP, or Friendly Adult Presence, at rehearsals and the mandatory weekly meetings where City's teenagers discuss community projects — one group adopted an elementary school — as well as personal transformation.

Jessica LoMonaco, 18, a graduate of New Utrecht High School in Bensonhurst, has been with City for four years. This year, she's finishing her freshman year as a prospective theater and psychology major at New School University. Until recently, she hadn't talked to her father

in five years. City at Peace finally changed that.

Andrilisa Read, a 17-year-old, is front and center, dancing and singing. She says, "I was shy before, and I never expected to meet so many people."

"The payoff," says Elin Morgan, a former actress who expanded Peace here from its original D.C. location, "is that 90% of them go on to college, grade point averages go up, so does their self-confidence and self-esteem."

Like many theater companies, the "AlieNation" cast forms a circle and holds hands before going onstage. But the words are all theirs.

"What do we want?" asks Flowers, stationed in the middle.

"Peace!" the voices ring out, and the sound is perfectly deafening.

CHORUS OF SUPPORT:
The cast of "AlieNation"

BRYAN SMITH