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## NY1 Theatre Review: "This Beautiful City"

By: Roma Torre

*A new documentary-style play titled "This Beautiful City" recently opened off-Broadway at the Vineyard Theatre. NY1's Roma Torre filed the following report.*

In New York City, when you hear there's an off-Broadway musical about evangelical Christians in Colorado Springs and their disgraced spiritual leader Ted Haggard, you might assume it's going to be a one-sided affair, skewing way to the left. But that's not quite the case with "This Beautiful City". That's because it was created by the theatre group The Civilians who took a journalistic approach spending months interviewing the real players in this American drama to get the true story. The result is enlightening and mostly engrossing.

Armed with a burning curiosity and a reporter's desire to get the facts, the entire company of six actors and the creative team landed in Colorado Springs to examine the mega church movement that completely transformed the city.

Spending 10 weeks talking to citizens across the political spectrum about the evangelical rise, they came up with docu-theatre -- a musical in a documentary style that uses the actual words culled from their interviews.

In the middle of all this, the Ted Haggard scandal broke. The revered founder of the New Life Church was revealed to have had a homosexual relationship and an addiction to crystal meth. It was quite a coup for this inquisitive troupe who happily incorporated the revelation into the show.

What they managed to accomplish is a complex show weaving many disparate elements into a fascinating patchwork about a town's desire to unite church and state. And while some may regard such a faith-based movement as heresy in this secular country, the church believers are not quite the villains you might expect.

Everyone has a story to tell, and pro or con, their personal journeys are humanizing.

It takes great skill to pull off such an ambitious project and The Civilians certainly possess the talent. Director Steve Cosson who also cowrote the piece with Jim Lewis did an excellent job along with composer Michael Friedman of capturing all sides.

And bravo to the ensemble of six actors in multiple roles who impressively painted real characters from a palette of monologues and song.

"This Beautiful City" feels a bit long and works a little better as journalism than theatre. But it's still plenty entertaining enough to warrant a trip.

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