



Critic's Pick



November 22, 2010

In the Footprint: The Battle Over Atlantic Yards

The Civilians wade into the bitter real-estate fight over Brooklyn.

By *Paul Menard*

For New Yorkers, apartments are like leaky life rafts: essential to our survival, but in reality, not as permanent as we would like them to be. For those Brooklynites losing their homes to make way for the highly controversial Atlantic Yards project, it's as if the neighborhood has been hit by an urban-development tsunami.

In the hands of the incisive docutheater company the Civilians, this ongoing struggle between residents and developers is less about politics and real estate and more about the fragility of communities and the ephemeral nature of home. Assembled from interviews with neighbors, politicians, activists and business owners, *In the Footprint* combines low-tech theatrics with intimate monologues to create a profoundly personalized collage. Supplemented by documentary video and zippy pedagogical songs by Michael Friedman (*Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*), the show cuts through the political spin to expose the backroom machinations and racial tensions beneath the surface of the Atlantic Yards controversy.

Sure, the production has a tendency to get bogged down in esoterica, but at its core is the deeply affecting struggle of fellow New Yorkers, who fear having their lives pulled out from under them, courtesy of eminent domain. Resonantly staged just blocks from the construction site itself, *In the Footprint* is that rare combination of theater, politics and community building. Forget the bulldozers: The Civilians prove that art can be groundbreaking too.