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BWW Special Feature: 99 and Under the Radar - The Downtown Renaissance

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Wednesday, February 9, 2011; Posted: 04:02 PM - by Michael Roderick

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Welcome back to to 99 AND UNDER THE RADAR: A LOOK AT INDIE THEATER'S MOVERS AND SHAKERS, BroadwayWorld's new weekly series that showcases standout productions and production companies from the independent theater scene in New York City. Each week, independent producer Michael Roderick will be discussing the latest goings on in the theatrical wings, highlighting those with potentially bright futures.

This Week's Topic: The downtown renaissance

It is often said that in difficult times, some of the best art is created. If the current array of shows playing downtown are any indication of the future, then that future looks considerably brighter than the weather we've been experiencing lately. From explorations of gentrification to giving the finger to the world of Christian rock, the indie community has tackled it all and with a stunning level of grace. The companies that have provided the Indie theatre scene with such gems? Art. Party Theater Company, Wide Eyed Productions, Clout in the Mug Productions, and La Mama.

La Mama recently closed a new show called Camp Wanatachi which had a previous run in FringeNYC and those who got to catch this limited run were really given quite the treat. This show defied many of the assumptions made about independently produced theatre with a set that rivaled many Broadway stages and talent that should be on Broadway right now. The show also introduced the audience to a brand new sound in musical theatre. A sound filled with beat boxes, reverb, wa wa pedals, and looped remixes. With that many new elements and such incredible design in both set and lights by [Marc Janowitz](#), there is a lot to live up to. The show exceeded the power within the first bouncy and hip tune incorporating actors moving through the audience, then squirting water pistols inches from your face. It's very rare for all of the elements of design and performance to come together so seamlessly, but director [Matt Cowart](#) blocks the piece with such skill, no one ever seems out of place. Cowart has assisted a number of great talents, but it won't be long before hundreds are assisting him. The work he did in this piece was inspired and he is certainly a director to watch in the coming years. The ensemble cast was extraordinarily tight in both their commitment to the show's subversive concepts and their vocals. A major standout was [Marissa O'Donnell](#) who's 3 o' clock number about being in love with a girl featured a note held so long that some audience members started looking at their watches in disbelief. Rounded out by a book that captures adolescence by the talented [Bekah Brunstetter](#) and Natalie Elizabeth Weiss and with choreography by Vanessa Walters that captured the frenetic pace of many of the electronica beats, and introduced us to the idea of lunch room "swag", Camp Wanatachi, much like summer camp, seemed to fly by. To see what you missed, check out their website [here](#).

On the other side of the street, the folks at Wide Eyed Productions opened their powerful night of one acts titled "A Girl Wrote it" The show features four plays by emerging female playwrights as an answer to the call of 50/50 in 2020 as well as a number of very funny interludes commenting on the challenges female playwrights face. The most thought provoking being [Bekah Brunstetter](#)'s piece about not being "outstanding" This was an evening of fantastic writing, directing, and performing. The evening featured plays steeped in genres like film noir, and absurdism while also providing some slapstick comedy. Most impressive was the piece "The Return of Toodles Von Flooz" by Lisa Ferber directed with razor sharp precision by Kristin Skye Hoffman. Betty O'Boozenberg, (a brilliant performance by Lisa



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Mamazza) delivers each horrible cliché with a confidence and pizzazz as the play careens towards a place even more wacky than when it started. All in all, a very good time is had by all. All of the shows are very strong and the team at Wide Eyed deserves to be commended for putting together an evening of such out and out quality. To snag your tickets before they are gone, click here.

And a mere 10 blocks up at the 14th street Y, The Red Fern Theater Company is presenting Gentrifusion. The piece is also a series of short plays hinged around the theme of gentrification. One of the most impressive things about Red Fern is how well produced the shows are. From the choice of set, to lights, to the order of the plays, Gentrifusion creates its own amazing fusion of art and culture. The pieces take a very hard look at what happens when our home becomes someone else's as the result of a shrinking wallet and rising rent. The work varies from a clever retelling of Our Town, to a tale of stealing cupcakes and purses. Most impressive is Crystal Skillman's wonderfully touching piece "Crawl" directed by Colette Robert. Skillman's dialogue between two brothers deciding to sell their home is so natural sounding and personal that one cannot help but be drawn in to the plight of these two men. The choice of this piece as a closer was a great one indeed. There are still some tickets left for this evening that will make you take a second look at your neighborhood. To grab them, go here.

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Michael Roderick has produced at Manhattan Theatre Source, Theater Row Studios, Where Eagles Dare, the Dorothy Strelsin Theatre, the Red Room, the Bridge Theatre at Shetler Studios and has produced shows in the NY International Fringe Festival, the Midtown International Theatre Festival, the Samuel French Off-Off Broadway Short Play Festival, among others. He has worked as an office associate for Davenport Theatrical Enterprises and has Off Broadway producing credit as an Associate Producer of the musical ROOMS a Rock Romance at New World Stages as well as an Associate Producer of The New Hopeville Comics at The Chernuchin Theater at ATA. Michael is currently the program director for Self-Producing Artists at Theater Resources Unlimited. Michael is also a graduate of the Commercial Theatre Institute's 14-week Program as well as the

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Six-week Creative Intensive Program. Michael is the organizer of the Independent Producers Alliance of NY and he holds a BA in Secondary Ed English and Theatre Performance from Rhode Island College as well as a Masters in Educational Theatre for Colleges and Communities from NYU.

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