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# You Are Now The Owner Of This Suitcase

nytheatre.com review by Heather Lee Rogers  
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I love New York. If you think the city that counts is just Manhattan (and sometimes Williamsburg), then you're really missing out. In this case, you're missing out on some wonderful theatre. I'm talking about Theatre 167's second installment in its trilogy about the Jackson Heights neighborhood of Queens called *You Are Now The Owner of This Suitcase!* What began last spring with the hit *167 Tongues* (referring to the many languages spoken in Jackson Heights) has evolved to the next level. For this show, seven accomplished playwrights bravely "fanned across the streets of Jackson Heights" asking people they met to tell them stories from their childhoods. What they collected inspired this play that lovingly tells the story of the many different cultures that make up this crazy neighborhood. As one character puts it, "this city is suddenly weirder than any place I have ever been."

I was expecting biographical confessions and monologues about overcoming adversity. Boy was I wrong! This is a straight-up, modern-day fairy tale—no less culturally inspired but much more fun. *You Are Now the Owner of This Suitcase* features a misunderstood witch, several magic suitcases, cell phones that deliver you to the place you dial, child-eating ogres, and a Prince in search of True Love. The characters include a young woman newly arrived from Ecuador seeking her grandmother, a lonely Korean seamstress who longs for a daughter, a little boy named Azucar who only wants candy, and a cell phone purveyor who speaks dozens of languages (played by Rajesh Bose, whose performance is particularly fun). One character describes another as "perfectly natural, an electronic Cinderella."

The play is full of humor, heart, and imagination; but it is first and foremost a play about its community. Most of the theatre I see is primarily attended by other professional theatre-makers. So it was a unique and profound treat to see theatre in (and about) a neighborhood that hardly ever hosts theatre attended by families in the community. Theatre 167 is presenting this play in the cafeteria of P.S. 69, which they have set up in an intimate thrust stage design. In a fun meta-theatrical twist, a character is looking for the very school we are sitting in and other locations nearby that most of the audience was familiar with. The night I went they had a nearly full house which included the local City Councilman and plenty of children. (The play delighted the kids as much as it did me.) It was a beautiful thing to see a room full of people obviously representing the wide-ranging cultural backgrounds and vocations the play portrays. In our shared recognition, we were all experiencing the joy, pride, and humor of this modern-day melting pot together.

Which is not to say that you have to live in Queens to appreciate this play. On the contrary, *You Are Now The Owner Of This Suitcase* is a great piece of theatre, with highly inventive writing, by any New York standard. I found it very reminiscent of Charles Mee's "Streets of New York" plays, so Mee fans should definitely check this out. P.S. 69 is just a few blocks from the Roosevelt Ave/74th St major subway hub so it's easily accessible by the 7, E, F, R & M trains. In fact, *You Are Now The Owner Of This Suitcase* would make a great opportunity to get introduced to Jackson Heights through a beautiful theatrical lens. Make a date of it and grab dinner beforehand at an Indian (or Peruvian or Thai or Columbian or Japanese or Tibetan...) restaurant. Jackson Heights, like *You Are Now The Owner of this Suitcase*, truly has something for everyone.

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