

THE LACKAWANNA BLUES

RUBEN SANTIAGO-HUDSON

ACT GEARY THEATRE

11-29-02



Me and the Significant Other took in one of the closing shows of ACT's "Lackawanna Blues" after the BBQ and I can say we have not enjoyed such a fine performance in many years. The show is a one-man tour-de-force glowing tribute to Miss Rachel "Nanny" Crosby, a boarding house owner in Lackawanna, New York who acted as surrogate mother and savior to hundreds, perhaps thousands of souls, including the author and actor, from about 1950 to 1981. In the course of 90 minutes or so, Ruben Santiago-Hudson achieved the impossible, in presenting over 20 characters, performing solo to the accompaniment of Bill Sims on guitar, sometimes flickering between two

characters engaged in conversation for minutes at a time, encompassing a 230 pound auto mechanic, a one-legged mental institution patient, a battered white woman, her abuser, several prostitutes, a handful of ex-convicts, and himself as he was as a boy growing up at 32 Wasson Avenue in the middle of what was frequently total chaos.

While creating the "atmosphere" of the time, Ruben described the midnight shindigs that featured "Doin' the Dog", and involved the entire audience to the delight of all.

"Nanny" was apparently a remarkable woman who provided a safehouse for hundreds and regularly provided assistance to hundreds more who lacked food, clothing or shelter or all of these together. In a typical incident she stood in the doorway facing an angry 250 pound wifebeater saying simply, "If you want to get at her now, you are going to have to go through me first. So you just try to give to me what you done give to her . . .". And in those cases, invariably, she would win.

Rishi Malli had this to say in the *Daily Californian*:" Her almost supernatural presence throughout the play is profound - providing in her calm wit and strength, sturdy shelter, freshly baked cornbread, and an open, divine love. It would not be a stretch to say that this play is completely Nanny-driven. All of the surrounding characters are peripheral tests of Nanny's superior grace and beauty. A beauty that is akin to Bessie Smith-raw and from the people. Nanny's distinct virtue diffuses through out the dim woody gleaning charm from heavy air."

(11/07/02)

Man, when that final curtain went down you never seen such a thunderous ovation at ACT with every audience member standing up to cheer this astonishing performance, making quite clear that Ruben Santiago-Hudson has demonstrated more talent in his little finger than lesser stars possess in their entire body. For 90 minutes he enthralled an audience used to the very best with talk, song, dance and even fairly sharp mouth-harp.

Joe Bob says, "Check it out!" Definitely.

Written and performed by Ruben Santiago-Hudson

Directed by Loretta Greco

Guitar music performed by Bill Sims, Jr.