



Goings On About Town's Best Off Broadway Theatre Shows of 2009

THE NEW YORKER

[CHAUTAUQUA!](#)
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The National Theatre of the United States's Chautauqua! Justin Bernaut

This year, Off Broadway (and Off Off Broadway) theatre yielded myriad pleasures, as well as some pain, from reconceived classics to star-driven spectacles to truly heart-wrenching dramas to elaborately offbeat displays of inventiveness. The bar was set high by several up-and-coming companies, and more than a few lesser-known writers and directors broke out with remarkable work.

There is no theatre company in New York quite like the National Theatre of the United States of America, and there was no other show this past season quite like this one. Modelled on the historical lecture circuit of the late nineteenth century, “CHAUTAUQUA!” (which played at P.S. 122) was part history pageant, part public service, part farce, and part Pirandellian theatrical experiment that earnestly sought to engage its local audiences not just with its past but with its present—a slick, ambitious, rigorous, and big-hearted celebration of all things theatrical

and democratic. If you missed it the first time, don't fret: it returns in January as part of the Public's "Under the Radar" festival. *(B.J.J.)*