

PRICE \$5.99

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THE NEW YORKER

BLACK NATIVITY NOW

At the beginning of this dazzling show, a musician (Kelvyn Bell, who composed the original score) steps onstage with an electric guitar and describes the church of his youth, built on the muddy ground of Buckwater, Missouri. "I just wanted to share some of the love, and some of the mud," he explains, launching into the gospel standard "Up Above My Head." There's a lot more love and mud to come: for the next eighty minutes, the ensemble just keeps topping itself in a blend of modern-dress nativity story, rousing revival meeting, and, most of all, first-rate soul-gospel revue. Alfred Preisser, director and co-writer (with Tracy Jack), lends wit and vitality to the tropes of each of these forms; it's a rare pageant that delivers this much warmth, energy, and depth of feeling. (Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 212-352-3101.)

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