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'Black Nativity Now'—a gospel celebration that blesses the soul

By **LINDA ARMSTRONG**
Special to the AmNews

Every year I look forward to November, because I usher in the holiday season with the Radio City Christmas Show. But now there's another show I wish would also start performances in November, since it is also the perfect vehicle for ushering in the holiday season—and that show is "Black Nativity Now." It is currently showing at the Theatre at St. Clement's Church on 46th Street between Ninth and Tenth avenues, through Jan. 2, 2011.

This production takes the audience to "church" as it shares the story of Jesus Christ's birth. The story is told in a church setting by a pastor played by Nikkiele Demone, who is actually an ordained bishop (so you can imagine that he knows how to take the "congregation" to church). The show also has a chorus leader, played by Jeff Bolding, who is actually the real-life director of the choir at

Abyssinian Baptist Church. There are so many aspects to this production that make it more than just a theater production about the holiday season, and it is presented with a unique spiritual power. It will have people saying "hallelujah" and "amen" and possibly proclaiming what God has done for you. I know it received that type of reaction from the people in the audience when I attended the show.

It is full of powerful songs from gospel to funk to soul, and is an experience you will long remember. It will uplift your spirit and inspire your heart. I know I walked out singing. It just leaves you with a good feeling to know how much the Lord cares for his people that



(Lia Chang photos)

he sent his only son, and that his son's birth was celebrated.

"Black Nativity Now" features foot-tapping and synchronized hand-clapping musical numbers with an original score and musical direction by Kelvyn Bell, a story written by Alfred Preisser and Tracy Jack, exciting and lovely cho-

reography by Jack and fantastic direction by Preisser. The show features a live band and an all-Black cast that dons choir robes, and you truly get the feel of being in the church, as they sing memorable, powerful songs and bring the spirit of the season to that stage. There is also a great deal of humor in this show.

The cast, along with Demone and Bolding (who sings and acts, in addition to playing the piano and directing the choir), includes Breanna Bartley, Melanie Charles, Vincent Leggett, Brittney Mack, Jarvis B. Manning, Jr., Amma Osei, Stephen Scott Wormley, Tracy Jack and Naja Jack.

You will have a marvelous time at this production. You will hear the story of the Black

Nativity, you will laugh, you may sing, and you will definitely shout praises to the Lord and be grateful for the blessings he has given you. As pastors often do at the conclusion of the service, Demone greets the audience in the lobby to thank you for coming and to collect an offering for the needy.

You need to go and experience this show and you can definitely take the children. Sitting in the audience, I just felt blessed.

For more information, go to www.BlackNativityOffBroadway.com or call 1-866-811-4111. The show is even being performed on Christmas Day, as well as the Sunday after. Remember, it's only around until Jan. 2. I truly hope that next year it can find a theater home in November to usher in the holiday season.

The production is presented by Jeffrey Glaser, Christopher McElroen, Alfred Preisser, Dana Watkins, Kingsize-USA and 9One Productions.