



# NEW YORK POST

LATE CITY FINAL

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## Night isn't silent on 42nd St.

By FRANK SCHECK

ANY church pastor looking for inspiration would be well advised to head to . . . 42nd Street. Unlikely as it seems, that's the location and setting of the latest revival of "Black Nativity," by the Classical Theatre of Harlem.

This updated version of Langston Hughes' gospel musical, returning to Times Square for the first time since its original production 46 years ago, boasts a soul-stirring musical and religious fervor.

As its title implies, the holiday show is a simple retelling of the Nativity story, here set in 1973 on a 42nd Street filled with hustlers, pimps, whores and the homeless. Accompanied by four musicians placed on modular platforms

### THEATER REVIEW

#### BLACK NATIVITY

★★★★ 1/2

*The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St.; (646) 223-3010. Through Dec. 30.*

above the stage, the large ensemble delivers a series of numbers — gospel, soul, funk and R&B.

Presiding over it all is the red-suited Pastor, played by Andre De Shields with so much energy and stamina, he suggests the love child of Mick Jagger and Tina Turner. (Whatever this 61-year-old is eating, I'll have what he's having.)

In the simply told story of Mary (Tracy Jack) and Joseph (the aptly

named Enrique Cruz DeJesus) finding their way to the manger, with the Three Wise Men (in Afro wigs and blinding Day-Glo outfits) in tow, the performers raise the roof with dynamic singing and dancing.

The adorableness factor is raised considerably by the presence of the Shangilia Youth Choir of Kenya as a chorus of angels, and a real baby who elicited coos of admiration from the women in the audience.

In one of the show's most powerful segments, "Silent Night/7 O'Clock News," the choir sings the familiar carol as De Shields reads aloud newspaper stories of violence and turmoil abroad. And I'm not just saying that because the paper he was reading from is the one you're reading now.



Stephanie Berger/AP

Andre De Shields brings an intense energy to "Black Nativity."