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Reviews

The Gathering

BAC, London

★★★★☆

BAC has played host to some pretty wild and wacky music-theatre pieces, but few could match the warmth and dynamism of Will Power's cracker of a one-man show. Power is a black American, born in Harlem and raised in San Francisco, who founded one of the US's first live hip-hop bands, Midnight Voices. Hip-hop and all the bluesy, jazzy poetry of black-American culture snake in and out of Power's piece, which offers snapshots of black-American men, from an old jazz musician to an entire baseball team and a three-year-old child. Power gets inside their heads and nuzzles their brains.

What makes The Gathering so interesting and attention-grabbing as a performance piece is not so much the things Power says as the way he says them. He is constantly using his body as though it is an instrument — and not just when he is giving an imitation of a double bass. The rhythms of speech and emotion are

always translated into the physical. Power makes the body sing. He is so loose and bendy that you begin to wonder whether he might be related to Twizzle.

This is a virtuoso performance and an immensely likable one. The show takes us on a whirlwind tour of the places where black men can meet, talk and, most importantly, be themselves, from the neighbourhood barber shop to the basketball court. Power creates every character in astonishing detail and always leaves you wanting to know more about each one, whether it's the young gay man who feels alienated from his community, the goofy teenager negotiating the financial niceties of a first date in McDonald's, or the belligerent HIV-positive crack addict, bewildered by what has happened to him.

The piece could yet develop further, but even as it stands it provides an intriguing glimpse at what it is like to be a black American male, and a chance to see an astonishingly talented rapper, writer and performer.

Lyn Gardner

Until December 9. Box office: 020-7223 2223.