

Time Out New York

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PULLMAN WA

By Young
Jean Lee,
Dir. Lee
With Pete
Simpson,
Tory
Vazquez
and Thomas
Bradshaw.
PS122

Pete Simpson would make a lousy motivational speaker, but he's hilarious at failure. Deadpan and sunken-eyed, Simpson takes the stage in the first half hour of Pullman, WA to deliver a studiously lame self-help talk, in which he sets the bar for happiness pretty low: "If you can wake up sober after a good night's sleep, it should feel good. I guess that's the meaning of life." If that panacea doesn't work for you, Simpson's fellow performers Tory Vazquez and Thomas Bradshaw enter soon after to provide even more meaningless pabulum in writer-director Young Jean Lee's perverse theatrical prank.

Lee's snaky, tart writing and her understanding of theatrical conventions seem to exist only so she can subvert and frustrate expectations. Last year, her profane mock-historical drama, *The Appeal*, imagined Romantic poets Shelley and Wordsworth as bickering, petulant slackers. In Pullman, WA, she dresses down the stage even more, using the aforementioned surrogates to inspire, insult, and comfort the audience in a fugue of failed communication. It's not clear if Lee is really addressing her audience or talking to herself, especially since the speakers deploy a disorienting and funny mix of childhood fantasy, teen anger and cheesy New Testament parable. Most unclear is what this minimalist exercise has to do with the midsize Pacific Northwest city of the title. In interviews, Lee cites it as her hometown, but the extent to which Pullman, WA is autobiographical remains a mystery. - *David Cote*