On Being a Woman, In Body, Mind and Spirit
'The Vagina Monologues'
Eve Ensler
Here

Every dramatic piece Eve Ensler writes has its program, and the one she presents in "The Vagina Monologues" is obvious: the ultimate self-definition of women. But this hour -- presented at Here, 145 Avenue of the Americas, south of Spring Street -- is considerably more convincing than much of her work, in part because of the authentic voices she has collected, and in part because she performs it herself, and very well.

The monologues, taken from her interviews with 200 women, range from rape as a weapon in Bosnia (the woman describes a gang rape as the destruction of a village, and the language has the intensity of poetry), to a 13-year-old's initiation in sex by a 24-year-old woman, to the birth of Ms. Ensler's own grandchild. Ms. Ensler punctuates them with riffs on such topics as past ignorance, abuse of women and, hilariously, euphemisms, as well as with litanies of words conjuring up women's images of themselves: chanted catalogues that entice taste, touch, sight and smell, eliciting roars from the audience.

That is cunning writing. But the best comes in a lesbian dominatrix's evocation of moans heard during orgasm -- a three-minute solo that has viewers screaming in delight -- and in an older woman's recollection of a girlhood embarrassment that ends in a recurring dream of her dining with Burt Reynolds when the restaurant is flooded. Sex just doesn't get funnier, or more poignant, than that.

D. J. R. BRUCKNER