

OFF BROADWAY

Not Your Grandma's Theatre

The Sensuous Woman

Theatre Review by [Matthew Murray](#)



Margaret Cho
Photo by Carol Rosegg.

Tattoos and cellulite might not send everyone's hormones raging, but Margaret Cho doesn't care. When the crack comedienne bares both, and oh so much more, in her new burlesque *The Sensuous Woman* at the Zipper Factory, it's to prove once and for all that the traditional ideal of female beauty is as outmoded as liposuction. At least for the everyday woman who've learned perhaps the most valuable skill of all: Being comfortable in their own skin.

Yes, Cho strips everything away in a dance number that combats the repression of Chinese Communism with a few good, old-fashioned bumps and grinds. Unashamed, unabashed, and most importantly undieted, she uses her dance to once and for all assume public control over the image that once cost her both her health and her mid-1990s sitcom *All American Girl*, and one can't help but be inspired by the personal liberty

she's developed and displays so willingly.

The Sensuous Woman, however, never imparts that same sense of grand accomplishment when anyone other than Cho is at its center. The eight other cast members, all drawn from the world of countercultural comedy and burlesque, further Cho's goal of presenting the full spectrum of attractiveness that's not confined (in reality, at any rate) to hourglass figures and six-pack abs. But their focus is so narrowly aimed away from the conventional that rapid-onset déjà vu is the most you can expect to feel from them.

What the show gets right is its immediate dispelling of your fascination with the extreme exotica of it all. Following an excerpt from Cho's culturally and politically charged stand-up, the first number finds dwarf dancer Selene Luna emerge from a baby carriage and doff her dainty duds with the blistering self-assurance of Gypsy Rose Lee. Once it's obvious what you're in for, it's easy to clear your mind and expect the unexpurgated.

But with gay rap numbers ("I'm a sexual homo!"), intercourse simulated through Spandex bodysuits, and Lady Justice (Miss Dirty Martini) revealing that money is what truly inside her heart (as well as, ahem, several other places), the desire to shock quickly overwhelms the desire to inform. This gives the show a creaky countenance that even the more meaningful and personal performances, chief among them Ian Harvie's ruminations about living as a lesbian, struggle to overcome. Admirable as all this inclusiveness might be, it ultimately does more harm than good.

With careful direction by Randall Rapstine and bubbly choreography by Kitty McNamee, *The Sensuous Woman* has no difficulty filling the stage, and Steven Capone's back-alley set and Josh Monroe's lighting also help set the proper down-and-dirty tone. But nothing, other than Cho, succeeds at making the ignored enticing for more than a few seconds at a time.

That's because she doesn't rely on gimmicks or artifice, but instead trusts in herself and her own terms of endearment. Abrasive and loud she might be, but dishonest she's not; in discussing her open approach to sexuality, she admits, "I'm not bi, I'm I," reflecting her obvious desire to make people happy, by any means necessary. While a few of the details she divulges about how she does this aren't really printable, they - like most of the monologues she performs - have side-splitting humor down pat.

“I just love everybody,” she says early on, “and I want everybody to love me.” Understandable though that might be, the diversions here don’t make it easy as Cho herself does. She’s learned how to love herself, and as a result it’s hard not to love her, even if that affection never fully translates to the rest of the sensual, imperfect world she presents in *The Sensuous Woman*.

The Sensuous Woman

Through November 3

Zipper Theatre, 336 West 37th Street between 8th and 9th Avenues

Tickets: www.thezipperfactory.com or call 212.352.3101 or 866.811.4111 (toll free)

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