



Off-Broadway Review: ‘Tanya Tagaq in Concert with Nanook of the North’ — Under the Radar Festival at the Public Theater

By Antigoni Gaitana | January 17, 2016

Friday night, and I enter The Public Theater with no specific expectations, but with a subconscious excitement. I have no knowledge on the Eskimo (Inuit) culture and I have never listened to Tanya Tagaq before. What I am about to watch is the screening of the first documentary ever made about the life near the Arctic Circle (*Nanook of the North* by Robert J. Flaherty, 1922) accompanied by the singing of Tanya Tagaq and the music of her group.



The hall is full and Tanya Tagaq enters the stage along with Jean Martin (drums), Jesse Zubot (violin), and Jeffrey Zeigler (cello). Tagaq is barefoot with almost no makeup on. She welcomes us with an extremely soft voice and the audience responds all together with a warm hello. When all the voices fade out a child’s voice is heard “Hi mommy!” – Tagaq’s daughter is there to witness her mother’s performance.

After this unexpected icebreaker, Tanya Tagaq gave us an introduction to the documentary and explained her motivation for creating this performance. “Indigenous cultures are believed to belong in museums, but I am still here, a modern Eskimo!” She talked about the colonial stereotypes presented in the film but also about its importance as it is the first glance in the Eskimo culture, about the importance of improvisation and how can chaos feel comforting.

From the very first moment of the screening, the music not only underlined the images, but often offered us a second level of the transmitted information and messages. All the instrumentalists were of the highest level and in perfect communication with each other. Tanya Tagaq’s presence was transformative. For 70 minutes, she created unique sounds and moved her body in the manner of animals. Her energy was extremely grounded and seemed as if it was renewed with every motion. Like a shaman she mesmerized and healed us with the story of her ancestors which proves that we are made to survive.