"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition

New York: Today, partly sunny, mild, high 61. Tonight, cloudy, rain arrives, low 44. Tomorrow, rain, heavy at times, windy, high 48. Yesterday, high 56. low 40. Weather man. Page C6.

OL. CLII . . No. 52,303

Copyright © 2002 The New York Time

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2002

\$1 beyond the greater New York metropolitan area

5 CENTS

THEATER REVIEW

Untamed Poetry, Loose Onstage

By BEN BRANTLEY

Does Con Edison know about the ast of "Def Poetry Jam"? The per-ormers on the stage of the Longacre heater, where the show opened last right, are giving off enough electric urrent to keep Manhattan in air-onditioning for a century of sumners. The hard-working choruses of nusicals like "Thoroughly Modern fillie" and "42nd Street" can dance until their shoes lose their taps, but hey still won't generate the energy ound in this gathering of angry young neets.

"Russell Simmons Def Poetry Jam n Broadway," to use the production's ull brand-name-wearing title, is the nost singular offering in mainstream lew York theater these days, even in season that has seen such anomalies s "Movin' Out," Twyla Tharp's allancing, no-talking pop musical, and he short-lived French bagatelle alled "Amour."

Produced by the eponymous Mr. immons, the mighty rap recording mperor, "Def Poetry" is basically othing more than nine people stand-

ing onstage reciting poems they have written. But this description, which summons clammy images of the classroom, fails to factor in the incandescent mix of exuberance, arrogance and exhibitionism with which each performer is invested.

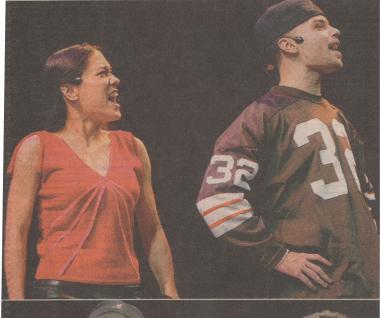
The poets of "Def Poetry" flaunt their words the way Fosse dancers flaunt their bodies, in muscle-flexing struts, slides and sashays. Listen to the following declarations: "I wanna hear a poem where ideas kiss similes so deeply that metaphors get jeal-ous." "I'm the mentally buff Chinese Hulk Hogan/ disciplined, determined and deadly."

And, "Spoken word is about to leave the ground like a plane, chain ganging, clanging like a school boy with a pan."

These lines, like most in the show, sound better than they read. You need to experience firsthand the body language that makes the verbal language spin and the voices that seem to get high off their own inflections. This is poetry for the stage, not the page, and it exists completely only in the moment it is being performed.

People can complain that much of

Continued on Page 4





Photographs by Sara Krulwich/The New York Time

Clockwise from top left, Mayda Del Valle, Lemon, Steve Colman and Poetri perform in "Russell Simmons Def Poetry Jam on Broadway."