



Performance in America: Contemporary U.S. Culture and the Performing Arts

David Román

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Performance in America demonstrates the vital importance of the performing arts to contemporary U.S. culture. Looking at a series of specific performances mounted between 1994 and 2004, well-known performance studies scholar David Román challenges the belief that theatre, dance, and live music are marginal art forms in the United States. He describes the crucial role that the performing arts play in local, regional, and national communities, emphasizing the power of live performance, particularly its immediacy and capacity to create a dialogue between artists and audiences. Román draws attention to the ways that the performing arts provide unique perspectives on many of the most pressing concerns within American studies: questions about history and politics, citizenship and society, and culture and nation.

The performances that Román analyzes range from localized community-based arts events to full-scale Broadway productions and from the controversial works of established artists such as Tony Kushner to those of emerging artists. Román considers dances produced by the choreographers Bill T. Jones and Neil Greenberg in the mid-1990s as new aids treatments became available and the aids crisis was reconfigured; a production of the Asian American playwright Chay Yew's *A Beautiful Country* in a high-school auditorium in Los Angeles's Chinatown; and Latino performer John Leguizamo's one-man Broadway show *Freak*. He examines the revival of theatrical legacies by female impersonators and the resurgence of cabaret in New York City. Román also looks at how the performing arts have responded to 9/11, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, and the second war in Iraq. Including more than eighty illustrations, *Performance in America* highlights the dynamic relationships among performance, history, and contemporary culture through which the past is revisited and the future reimagined.

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