



Welcome to *CityBeat's* coverage of the 2006 Cincinnati Fringe Festival. For our critics' previews of each performance, [click here](#). As our critics see each production, they post their reviews below (check back every day for updates).

FRINGE 2006 REVIEW: *Eenie Meanie* by and featuring Teresa Willis

REVIEW BY JANE DURRELL

Teresa Willis is attuned to her times — our times — with an insight like perfect pitch, and she has crafted a fine stage presence to tell us about it in *Eenie Meanie*, presented at the Contemporary Arts Center. Born in 1960, Willis first experienced the roil of developing African-American presence in society at large as a white girl born in Kentucky, when she is five years old and a black man is in her house for the first time ever. She is both confused and fascinated. A few years later, puzzling over the designated skin colors (red, yellow, white, black) she wonders where the flesh-colored people would be. Ah, she discovers that “flesh-colored” is actually white.

This incongruity is as apparent to the child Teresa as it continues to be to the grownup, but nothing is simple and her responses are as human as humane. She's usually the odd one out, which is of course the best way to see what's really going on. She's the child who insists the “eenie meenie” rhyme should use “tiger” instead of “nigger,” and gets cut out of the game for her trouble. She also reports scornfully on school busing from a participant's view. Nobody wants it, black or white, and whatever social consciousness she had as a pre-adolescent is pretty much aside from the point of being gloriously, painfully teen-aged.

Willis is a wonderfully physical actor, changing age and attitude in a mini-second and capable of making the act of putting her hair onto rollers an interesting exercise. She is certainly not the first to explore this material, but her presentation is so fresh and her insights so acute that the audience is with her from the moment she shoots onto the stage, claiming to be five years old. Although costuming and props are deliberately minimal, the production incorporates technically sophisticated audio/video.

Willis' vignettes move swiftly along and find her in Louisville, Lexington, New York, Hollywood and other southern California outposts. Perhaps the most moving, though, is a segment in which she has come home and is driving her parents on “I-75 South” and a very human, deeply ingrained reluctance to accept other cultures saps her parents' long-held liberal views. They want everyone to have the rights, but to be “just like us.” She lectures them, as self-righteous as they are, and then later after her father has died understands something more of the layered difficulties of human interaction. If everything fell easily into black and white, we'd not be so easily misled.



Photo By James Czar
Eenie Meanie by and featuring Teresa Willis

Good theater helps to show the beige, and *Eenie Meanie* is good theater. **Grade: A**