



The clerk sings about techniques of dealing with frustration and with constant demands.

## BREAD & ROSES

Patient: Hospital Workers  
 Rx: Music, Song, + Dance  
 Dosage: Once at lunch

By Pat Aufderheide

**T**HE NURSE IS FULL OF STORIES about the doctor who got away. The therapist just blew her spending money on the numbers, as the admitting clerk reminds her when she criticizes the clerk for her large clothing bills.

The aging male med tech, oblivious to everyone else's sandwich, mulls over the morning's sputum specimens, until the women shout him down.

Lunch time at the hospital?

Yes. But these aren't hospital workers. They're professional actors, and they're in the middle of a 45-minute musical revue in which the tension of daily hospital work is turned into jokes, sallies, poignant ballads, skits and one last wonderful chorus. They're bringing the revue to hospital workers on their lunch break.

It's a play called *Take Care*, another cultural project from the Bread and Roses people. This is the program of NY District 1199 of Hospital and Health Care Employees union that has pioneered cultural events and projects for its members. The list of Bread and Roses' success is already 40 projects long. That's pretty impressive for a program that, despite its decades-long roots, is in this incarnation little more than a year old and dependent on patchwork funding.

Bread and Roses has produced and co-produced books, posters, filmstrips and videotapes. It sponsors events. The

The nurse recounts how a doctor made her the "fall guy" with a complaining patient.



union has brought Harry Belafonte to the Lincoln Center twice for the membership. Upcoming is a "Bread and Roses Day" to celebrate the victory of the Lawrence strike in Lawrence, Mass. And workshops and seminars on labor history allow members to learn about the past and also express the frustrations and tensions of the present style of work.

Bread and Roses has sponsored exhibitions of photography and painting in 1199's gallery. Earl Dotter's photographs of textile and coal mining—later made into a portfolio, *In Mine and Mill*—were shown there. So was the photographic work of Georgeen Comeford on hospital workers, called "1199: A Family Portrait." An exhibition of paintings called *The Working American* showed how artists have portrayed work in different eras.

### Drawn from life.

*Take Care* is an excellent example of 1199 cultural programming. The revue, composed of five players and a three-man band, is elegant and honest. It's hard not to go out humming one of the tunes, especially from the final chorus, "Looking Good." ("Looking good" is the obligatory phrase to patients, no matter how they look.) It's drawn from real life, accessible during work hours to the people it portrays, and the process of making it was as important as is the result.

Moe Foner, director of the Bread and Roses program had the idea for the revue. He suggested a professional production to Ossie Davis, who's been associated with 1199 for 25 years. Writers Eve Merriam (*Inner City, The Club*), Micki Grant (*Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope, Working*), Lewis Cole (*A Loose Game*) and Helen Miller (*Inner City*) got interested too.

"Eve suggested that we should hold workshops for the members on their work experience, and use that material for the revue," said Foner to *IN THESE TIMES*. "So we set up workshops with different kinds of hospital workers, and the material was just incredibly rich. The writers wrote from that."

"*Take Care* is like a mirror. Everything in it is out of the workshop."

The workshop itself was a sizeable project. Members submitted diaries and photographs. The sessions were videotaped.

"At first people tended to present rosy pictures of their lives," said Lewis Cole, who led the workshops. "By and large workshop members were immensely proud of their work, and they didn't want to say anything that would reflect badly on themselves. But increasingly they trusted one another's judgement and they revealed their thoughts, feelings and experiences. Sometimes they gave a fuller picture of themselves than they meant to."

The revue was supposed to tour New York hospitals for four or five weeks. But word spread fast, and the tour was extended. Then people in the Labor Department in Washington wanted to see the show too, and then unions in other cities put in their bid to bring the tour on the road. Now not only has the revue been touring for 12 weeks, but an original cast album has been made, and public TV is talking about airing a videotape of the show.

Audiences, both workers and patients, are delighted to find themselves represented so expertly, with wit and poignancy.

"It's like seeing a Broadway play for free," said one clerk typist.

"This lets us see ourselves, and that is a rare treat," said a nurses' aide. "Normally only doctors and nurses are considered fitting subjects for TV and musicals about hospital life."

Actor Clyde Williams finds audience response exhilarating. He plays a night worker who chooses that shift because he can't sleep after several live-in horror years as a Vietnam paramedic.

"I've had people come up afterwards and say, 'Thank you, now I can finish the day's work on the ward.'"

### Professionals.

*Take Care* works, not just because hospital workers can see themselves on stage.

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