

Readers' Choice Awards

NYC: Favorite Off-Off-Broadway Theatre Company to Act With

As the nonunion resident ensemble at the **Flea Theater**, not only do the Bats sport an eerie name, but their work is as fearless as any upside-down critter fluttering in a cave. Last winter, more than 20 Bats appeared in Artistic Director Jim Simpson's revival of Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience*, a play without stage directions, dialogue, or narrative, staged in the Flea's shallow lower-level space. The company broke the fourth wall regularly, attacking Handke's text just inches from the audience. As in the mainstage plays that run in the Flea's formal upstairs space, there was an expectation of the unexpected.

A Bat since December 2006, Donal Brophy thinks of the Flea as an actor's haven. "I'm originally from Ireland and graduated school two years ago," he says. "Many of the Irish institutions set up in New York 10 years ago are maturing now, and while they used to welcome young, non-Equity start-off actors, now they're established and harder to infiltrate. From the first impression, I was struck by the Flea's professionalism. I signed in to audition, had a coffee, and right on the button they called. I



Bat company members in Peter Handke's *Offending The Audience*. Photo: Max Ruby

auditioned for the genius that is Jim Simpson."

Brophy received "good feedback" from Simpson, he says, but no invitation. Indeed, few of the 1,000-plus actors auditioning annually for the Bats receive offers. "Then they did some one-acts, and out of the blue they called," he says.

"There was a part for a mute caretaker in a Len Jenkin play." A lead role and a character part followed. "They're very brave," Brophy says of the Flea. "They're never put off by strange, hard-to-produce pieces. There's nowhere in New York that does what the Flea does."

— Leonard Jacobs