

# This Beautiful City



**COLORADO SPRINGS ETERNAL** Megachurch members look to the Lord for guidance.



**Vineyard Theatre** (see Off Broadway). By Steven Cosson and Jim Lewis. Music and lyrics by Michael Friedman. Dir. Cosson. With ensemble cast. 2hrs 5mins. One intermission.

Even in the haloed halls of Colorado Springs, the nerve center of the American evangelical movement, the devil lurks in corners, pushing dime bags of sin. "It is a very real battle," says a leader of Revolution House of Prayer in *This Beautiful City*. "And in battles there are casualties." Happily, those casualties do not include the Civilians, New York's premier docutheater troupe, which decamped to Colorado in 2006 to examine the swelling of religious fervor there. This visit happened to coincide with the speedy flameout of closeted megalopastor Ted Haggard, whose fall from grace permeates the text that Steven Cosson and Jim Lewis fashioned from interviews conducted by the company. Much of this enlightening and often

moving collage draws a Venn diagram of religious faith and homosexuality, with special attention to where they overlap. (Fatherliness and fatherhood—whether pastoral, gay or both—are persistent leitmotifs.)

By Civilians standards, *This Beautiful City* is circumscribed: Its borders of time and place give it something like a plot. Spurred by Michael Friedman's irregular musical interludes (which add more color than depth this time), Cosson's six performers play dozens of characters, and all have shining moments. I was especially moved by the superb Emily Ackerman as an ostracized transsexual, Stephen Plunkett as Haggard's candid son and Brad Heberlee as a dazed pastor at Haggard's church; Marsha Stephanie Blake, Brandon Miller and Alison Weller fill out the cast admirably. In less capable hands, the show might have slid into slippery condescension, but Cosson and his company are too smart for that. They're on the side of the angels.—*Adam Feldman*