

Cameos

VOICE May 22, 1990

THEATER

"I recognize you from your voice," a blind woman says to Nikki Giovanni. "You're that Italian poet." To prove her mistaken, Giovanni says touch my hair. The woman does and begins a low, slow chuckling. This is one of many amusing moments in *Nikki G: Portrait of Nikki Giovanni In Her Own Words* (Harlem School of the Arts Theatre). Miki Biggins brings the required cadence and a sharp energy to the poet's reminiscences. Giovanni's memories, stretching from childhood to the mid-'70s, are punctuated by scenes with her family. The funniest (because Nikki, after all, comes from firmly middle-class roots, generations of college grads no less) deals with her decision, when broke, to go on public assistance. The "civil servant" refuses her application and Nikki begins to call her down when who should come up the hallway but her mother, a welfare supervisor. The anger and rebelliousness of the poet aren't lost in this production, just nuanced by the endearing performances of a solid cast and Giovanni's wit.

—Lisa Kennedy