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IN PERFORMANCE: THEATER; Crisis and Harmony In the Next-Door Garage

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'Heat Lightning' Kirk Theater

A new theatrical form may be taking shape at the Kirk Theater on 42nd Street: the garage band musical. The show, "Heat Lightning," about 75 minutes of songs tied together with a little bit of story, is so scruffy, relaxed and intimate that you feel as if you're watching one of those three-chord garage bands that bang out ragged music mostly for the fun of it.

That is partly because the stage is roughly the size of a garage, and because you are indeed watching a band: the musicians are planted right alongside the actors. The main character, Seth (Sean Fri), slips in and out of the band, since in the story he is a country-rock singer.

Seth is having a midlife-crisis moment, cheating on his wife, Cris (Laura Marie Duncan), with a luscious temptress named Aurora (Coleen Sexton). The two backup singers in Seth's bar band (Jennifer Waldman and Jackie Seiden) mock him a lot, in perfect harmony.

The play, by George Griggs and Paul Andrew Perez, which runs through April 20, doesn't have much more than that on its mind, plotwise. Mostly it's a vehicle for Mr. Griggs's songs, many of them pretty punchy, all of them delivered well by the talented singers. A wry number called "Ordinary Life" early on sets a nice tongue-in-cheek tone; the play and the actors rip along just on the edge of camp

and parody for most of the way. The plot and the novelty run out before the music does, but that's the way it is in garages; if you want neat and genteel, find a living room. NEIL GENZLINGER

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