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## Family Fare

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### Fighting on Two Fronts

Marcus Jackson is like any number of urban youths: idealistic and ambitious, born to life in a rough neighborhood but eager for something better. His options limited by poverty, he pursues what seems like a solid route to future education and job skills. He joins the armed forces.

Where this critical choice leads him is the subject of "Over There/Over Here," an impressive, poignant new work by Michael Reyes, a 22-year-old playwright who developed the script with the actors of Youth Onstage! at the All-Stars Project. Not surprisingly, Marcus's decision lands him quickly in Iraq, where the audience meets him in November 2003. Marcus, in a nuanced performance by Michael Alcide, is dedicated to the cause and to his girlfriend (Lisa Edwards) and little daughter; his bunkmate, Ramirez (Johanny Paulino), who deals drugs, sees the war as just another hustle.

If the play's dialogue seems natural and unforced, it may be because Mr. Reyes himself served in Iraq. And by natural, I also mean laced with the colorful profanity you might expect from Baghdad by way of Brooklyn. But the speech isn't as obscene as the situations Marcus finds him-



**Christlabelsay Elian and Johanny Paulino in the Youth Onstage! production of *Over There/Over Here*.**

self in, first in Iraq and later in Crown Heights, where he returns a changed man. The play proves that "over here" can feel as much like a war zone as "over there."

Mr. Reyes has relieved his story's somberness with humor, including a hilarious turn by Christlabelsay Elian as Marcus's Jamaican cousin. Directed by Brian Mullin, all the actors inhabit their roles convincingly. Regardless of their stand on the

war, middle and high school students will find this two-hour play a moving portrait of a young man who traded one bullet-ridden hell for another.

"*Over There/Over Here*," tonight and tomorrow night at 7, Sunday at 2:30 p.m., at the All Stars Project, 543 West 42nd Street, Clinton; (212) 941-1234 or [all-stars.org](http://all-stars.org). Tonight and tomorrow, \$25; Sunday, \$20.