

Art in Review



GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE

A singer belts out "God Bless America" at a Park Avenue corner in Dara Friedman's "Musical," which was filmed in Manhattan.

Dara Friedman

Musical

Gavin Brown's Enterprise
620 Greenwich Street, at Leroy
Street, West Village
Through June 28

Do yourself a favor and don't miss Dara Friedman's exhilarating one-hour video "Musical." It is based on a series of live performances that Ms. Friedman, based in Miami, orchestrated in New York last fall. During a three-week period she paid people from different walks of life — including office workers, cabdrivers, young mothers, schoolchildren and tourists — to sing without accompaniment in public places throughout the city. They did so in daylight and at night on sidewalks, in coffee shops, in parks, on church steps and on office building plazas.

The film is an engrossing, often deeply moving documentary montage of 60 different people singing mostly romantic pop songs. Some of the singers look and sound like professionals, and even the ones who don't are impressive. Passers-by look quizzically at them or at the camera. A man gives money to a scruffy youth singing "Ave Maria" in the busy main hall of Grand Central Terminal. In the final scene a young blond woman in a red dress sings "God Bless America" on a Park Avenue corner with a passion guaranteed to create a lump in your throat.

Beyond the entertainment factor, Ms. Friedman's film produces an uncanny layered effect. Its resemblance to a Hollywood musical and its documentary realism combine to produce a curious blurring of fiction and reality. And as the performers sing their songs of love and yearning, the wall between the emotionally charged inwardness of the individual and the vast, mechanical anonymity of the modern metropolis momentarily falls.

KEN JOHNSON