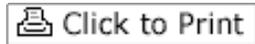


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## Visiting Mr. Green

at the Colony Theatre

Reviewed by Jon Steely

September 09, 2009

Sometimes the truth about ourselves, as well as a genuine emotional connection, emerges from the most unlikely set of circumstances. This is the premise of Playwright Jeff Baron's delightful set of conversations between two Jewish New Yorkers from opposite ends of the generation gap who experience revelation through forced intimacy.

Mr. Green (the fantastic Jack Axelrod) is a bitter, cantankerous old man who is almost run over by a young, reckless driver named Ross (Antonie Knoppers). As a court-ordered punishment for his moving violation, Ross, bearing kosher soup, must make weekly visits to help Mr. Green in the elder man's Upper West Side Manhattan apartment. What begins as a lighthearted comedy about two men who resent having to spend time together unfolds into a profound exploration of each man's personal issues and inner turmoil.

Both men are loners, having given up on love and the possibility of any future relationships. Eighty-six year old Mr. Green has withdrawn from life due to the death of his wife and his daughter's decision to marry a gentile. Twentysomething Ross is gay and finds himself trapped in a constant struggle to cope with his father's prejudices and disapproval of his sexual identity.

Director David Rose's empathy for these characters and their plights shows in his sensitive navigation through this poignant dramedy. Though an enjoyable two

hours, Baron's play does not teach any new life lessons. We have seen this Neil Simonesque setup before, usually involving Walter Matthau. Despite strained efforts and frequent disregard for subtlety, Knoppers turns in a likeable and more than competent performance. But it is Axelrod, with his seasoned chops and understanding of the depths and wounds of emotional pain, who makes this production stand out. The strength of his portrayal of Mr. Green lifts this rather ordinary concept off the ground and turns it into something terrific to watch: a nice meditation on the notion that it is, as Bob Dylan said, "Strange how people who suffer together have stronger connections than people who are most content."

*Presented by and at the Colony Theatre, 555 N. Third St., Burbank. Aug. 29-Sept. 27. Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun. 2 and 7 p.m. (Also Thurs., 8 p.m. Sept. 17 and 24. Sat., 3 p.m. Sept. 17 and 24.) (818) 558-7000. ext. 15. [www.colonytheatre.org](http://www.colonytheatre.org).*

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