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REVIEW: David Greenspan plays 'The Patsy'

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Vintage 1920s Broadway comedy returns as a solo tour-de-force

BY MICHAEL SOMMERS
NEWJERSEYNEWSROOM.COM
OFF BROADWAY REVIEW

Writer-actor David Greenspan is a veritable shape-shifter who transforms instantly into other people.


Greenspan displays his marvelous gifts by playing the eight different characters inhabiting "The Patsy," a long-lost 1925 Broadway hit by Barry Connors.


The revival, which opened Sunday at The Duke of 42nd Street, is yet another smart show from Transport Group Theatre Company whose eclectic offerings include the recent musical "Lysistrata Jones" and that environmental staging of "The Boys in the Band" in a penthouse.


A comfortable little Cinderella-ish comedy set in a suburban living room, "The Patsy" centers on 19 year-old Patricia, whose crabby mother, Mrs. Harrington, prefers her nasty elder sister Grace. Let's skip any further notes except to remark that as a play this cute piece of antique fluff essentially holds interest only for aficionados of vintage drama.

What makes "The Patsy" so delightful and out of the ordinary as theater these days is director Jack Cummings III's witty staging and especially Greenspan's vivid artistry as a chameleon

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as he performs the play entirely by himself.

Set designer Dane Laffrey provides a square box that is symmetrically furnished with 1920s pieces – a moderne-style credenza and fringed lamps scream the period – yet contains no windows and doors nor the staircase that the characters use in the course of the play. Such handsome yet stylized visuals underscore and also enhance the unusual nature of the presentation.



Garbed in a lavender sweater and grey dress pants, Greenspan simply climbs onto the stage and begins the intermission-less 75-minute piece by announcing the play and describing the room in which the Harrington family's story transpires over three acts and several weeks' time.

Then he portrays everybody: The ingenuous, restless Patricia, spiteful, petulant Grace, neurotic Mrs. Harrington, long-suffering Mr. Harrington, the breezy rich guy Billy (who loves Grace), the sweet though somewhat obtuse Tony (who doesn't know yet he loves Patricia), a local society girl and a wisecracking taxi driver.

Fluently switching characters as they talk to one another, Greenspan effortlessly changes voices, body language and personalities. There's never any doubt who is speaking in arguments or scenes involving several individuals. The romantic scenes for Patricia and Tony are particularly graceful – a near-kiss between them is a lovely moment of intimacy. Greenspan performs it all beautifully and believably.

Neatly pacing the actor's unflagging performance, Cummings employs nifty touches, such as designer Michael Rasbury's obviously clunky sound effects for doorbells and telephones, meant to provide a slight sense of distance that makes Greenspan's reality all the more winning.

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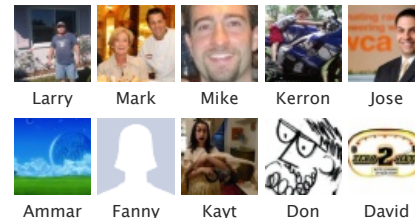
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