

# Theater: A Lost 'Found;' And Lost 'Generations' at Soho Rep

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**FOUND** \*\* out of \*\*\*\*

**GENERATIONS** \*\* 1/2 out of \*\*\*\*

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**ATLANTIC THEATER COMPANY AT LINDA GROSS THEATER**

OK, so you created a fun idea for a magazine. It was [Found, a zine that celebrated "found" bits of text](#) -- notes left on cars, shopping lists dropped on the ground, letters discovered inside a second-hand book and so on. They're enigmatic, funny, sad, kind of beautiful. It becomes a public radio-ish sort of success and you do open mike nights where the magazine creatives read out the best of the best and audience members contribute and it's a lot of fun. And somewhere along the way, someone says, this should be a musical!

But what kind of musical? Just reading out random scraps of text -- even grouped by category like "love" or "money" -- would grow pretty exhausting. Should they be declaimed? Or set to music? What if you created skits that imagined what led to some of these angry, inspiring and sometimes downright bizarre missives? Or created a show about the magazine that incorporated the stuff everyone loved the most?

The answer to these questions became: all of the above. Found, with a book by Hunter Bell & the show's director Lee Overtree and music and original lyrics by Eli Bolin, does everything you can think of and more. They use the founding of Found as an excuse to tell a very familiar story about idealism crashing against reality. And toss in a lot of snippets of humor from randomly discovered bits of text along the way because that's what got 'em there. None of it works very well.

The story -- such as it is -- revolves around Davy (a bland but likable Nick Blaemire). He loses his job during a horrible, no good, very bad day that ends weirdly: by finding an amusingly angry and plaintive note on his car meant for someone else. The woman who wrote it mistook the car for her lover's, accuses him of cheating on her, declares in no uncertain and foul-mouthed terms that they are through but ends by saying he should page her later. It's very funny. And the note is unfortunately repeated about eight different times throughout the show as a prime example of what Found is about.

Davy talks with his friends Denise (Barrett Wilbert Weed) and Mikey D (Daniel Everidge) about the note and inspired by his passion and a clutch of other scraps they find along the way, the three of them turn this hobby into a zine and then into an honest-to-god paying gig, including tours that draw bigger and bigger crowds everywhere they go. They're doing something they love and having fun doing it!

We can't have that, not in a musical. So though Davy makes his interest in Denise clear and she's single and available and clearly into him, for some inexplicable reason she doesn't want to take that next step. In walks a TV producer named Kate (Betsy Morgan), who starts dating Davy, insinuates herself on the tour and convinces him to pitch Found as a TV show a la America's Funniest Home Videos. Will Davy sell out? Will he leave his friends out in the cold? Will he and Denise ever act on their feelings?

If this story sounds tiresomely familiar, it is. Happily, the show is peppered with quick snippets of notes that

relate in some random way to the banal plot at hand. Some notes are set to music and while the music is never more than functional, those are far preferable to the forgettable original tunes that barely make an impression at all. More problematically, the longer and more intrusive notes -- however funny on their own -- make you feel the show is drifting away from the actual story.

Found is well over two hours in length. When the show grinds to a halt to enact lengthy sketches that imagine the story behind certain notes -- such as the drawn-out act one closer "Johnny Tremain" and the act two opener "Cats Are Cats" -- you feel impatient to get back to the actual plot. But when you get back to the actual plot, it's so uninspired you regret even that. It's the worst of both worlds.

Most everyone in the show acts like a jerk at some point: Denise behaves petulantly during their big meeting with ABC. Davy is insufferable when he wants to blow off magazine signings or tour dates just to hang with his new girlfriend or go take "meetings" in LA. Kate does a very bad job of managing expectations for Davy though she could hardly expect him to be quite this clueless. (Is he really aghast that ABC won't air a note complete with multiple F bombs in primetime? For a family show?) Mikey D...well, actually he behaves decently throughout.

While the songs are generally a bust, the music is delivered nimbly by the musicians on -- or rather under and around the stage. A definite plus is the choreography by Monica Bill Barnes which is distinctive and odd, with lots of hand movements and silly little moves. It feels like choreography for people who maybe aren't the best dancers? But it works and has a nice, quirky sensibility ideal for this show.

In the main roles, the women are better than the men, with Weed an appealing presence in particular. Since the leads must shoulder the burden of the dull central storyline, it's the ensemble that has the most fun. Danny Pudi and Christina Anthony shine in various parts, with Orville Mendoza and especially the straight-faced goof Andrew Call having a blast as well.

But the longer the show goes on, the less interest it maintains. Looking back, one doubts any of the other approaches to turning Found into a musical would have been terribly interesting either. Their appreciation for those little scraps of humanity is sweet. It just didn't need to burst into song.

**GENERATIONS** \*\* 1/2 out of \*\*\*\*

**SOHO REP AND THE PLAY COMPANY AT SOHO REP**

Context is everything. I had friends who went to see Generations based on the terrific recent track record of Soho Rep and a description of this show that mentioned it was set in a kitchen in South Africa and included a lot of singing. They're veteran theatergoers happy to tackle all sorts of shows both traditional and avant garde. But without any idea this was not a traditional play with music, they were unmoored. Forewarned, I was much better prepared to appreciate Generations for what it is. But it really does pay to know if you're in for a three hour musical, a 20 minute Brechtian howl of despair or a 90 minute farce.

So let's be clearer than the advance publicity for this intriguing if ultimately opaque work presented with care and intelligence by a talented cast. Generations is a performance piece. It lasts a brief half hour. And while quality is never linked to quantity, such a short running time is unquestionably good to know in advance. The night I attended, I stood up and began to go while most everyone else seemed a little confused: was it over? Yes, it was.

The piece by Debbie Tucker Green is an enigmatic one. But the presentation by Soho Rep and [The Play Company](#) is of the highest order. Rep's space has been turned into a township, complete with a red clay earthen floor, tin walls with colorful imagery and the suggestion of a crowded, very modest kitchen overflowing with spices and dishes and the usual implements of life. There's a wooden table, a rocking chair and in the center of the floor, a working kitchen with food already simmering as the audience comes in.

People take their admittedly rough seats (sometimes chairs, sometimes merely a milk crate with a cushion) and it's easy to spot what one imagines are cast members scattered among us. (Though the man next to me I easily spotted as a ringer, the man next to him fooled me genially beforehand by telling the actor I'd spotted that he looked familiar. "Were you in The Lion King?" he asked. I realized how funny that really was when the show began and they both stood up and started singing.)

The story begins with song, beautifully and captivantly sung by about a dozen people scattered throughout the space. It's like being inside a choir and I can only hope my toe-tapping didn't throw off the singer next to me. Then begins a very brief acting out of the text. A young man is courting a young woman and her even younger sister disapproves. The parents of the girls look on amusedly while the grandparents offer their two cents as well. They've seen it all before. This courtship -- this innocently sexy dance -- revolves around the question of whether the young woman can cook, a word that takes on many meanings throughout the night. "I was the cooker -- she was the cookless!" intones the mother at one point.

The very modest scraps of dialogue become building blocks. The words are repeated again and again, interrupted by songs. They are playful and then sexy, then serious, then angry, then sad. Despite only a few lines each at best, the actors are impeccable and create vivid characters and shades of meaning. The implied daytime setting of the beginning turns to dusk and then nighttime. Actors slowly slip into the crowd until only the grandparents are left alone, intoning the words one last time before a burst of song lifts you up at the end. And it's over.

Knowing it was only half an hour and that the dialogue was Pinter-esque certainly helped. But I was befuddled when my friend afterward insisted they had read about a twist at the end that put the entire evening in a new light. What had we missed? It turns out that many others have seen the show as a cry from the heart about the ravages of AIDS. How one would suss that out strictly from watching the show, I've no idea. But certainly one sensed a certain sadness, though it seemed more universal than AIDS. It might have been the splintering of a family -- children do move away or find distractions that simply stop them from coming around. Or it might have been violence or war. I really didn't get the sense that the people who disappeared from the stage in this brief work had died so much as just weren't present anymore.

Perhaps knowing the lyrics of the songs would have made the purpose of the evening clearer. Were they mourning those who had died? The dialogue was in English but the original songs -- evocatively written and arranged by Bongji Duma -- were not. I'd love to hear them again. I appreciated the care and craft with which director Leah C. Gardiner and her cast and crew offered this work. But without a lot more context (or at least footnotes!), *Generations* seems to me too abstract to register as more than an intellectual framework of an idea. The fact that it inspired those around her to such passionate effort makes me eager to see Green's next effort. But it does not make me eager to send people to this one.

## THEATER OF 2014

[Beautiful: The Carole King Musical](#) \*\*\*

[Rodney King](#) \*\*\*

[Hard Times](#) \*\* 1/2

[Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead](#) \*\*

[I Could Say More](#) \*

[The Loneliness Of The Long Distance Runner](#) \*\*

[Machinal](#) \*\*\*

[Outside Mullingar](#) \*\*\*

[A Man's A Man](#) \* 1/2

[The Tribute Artist](#) \*\* 1/2

[Transport](#) \*\*