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**Michael Giltz**

Freelance writer

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## Theater: Frank Langella Mans Up For Revival "Man And Boy"

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**MAN AND BOY \* 1/2**  
**AMERICAN AIRLINES**  
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All credit to actor Frank Langella. Even in a flawed production of a flawed play, Langella manages to create some emotional truth on stage, to entertain however briefly the audience on hand while staying true to the character. A pro, Langella makes the most of a scene where he cannily takes the seat of a competitor, mines the humor of "what fun!" and a simple "no" and generally does his best, from his first entrance to that final squeeze-out-a-little-more-applause move at the end of the curtain call.

Unfortunately, this production of Terence Ratigan's *Man And Boy* gives even Langella precious little opportunity to draw upon that talent. It's easy to see why the Roundabout chose to revive this 1963 work. It focuses on a Bernie Madoff financier of sorts whose paper empire is crumbling in dramatic fashion. Hoping to rescue a merger that might hide his financial sins (and hide from reporters), Gregor Antonescu (Langella) retreats to the dingy basement apartment of his estranged son Basil (Adam Driver). Throw in a closeted gay man, a deeply conflicted parent who despises attachment and you've got yourself a lot of contemporary hooks to draw in an audience.

But not the way it's delivered here. Director Maria Aitken (who scored with *The 39 Steps* and reportedly staged *Man and Boy* to acclaim in London with David Suchet) has an unfocused, unconvincing hand here. Nothing works -- not the tepid romance between the secretive Basil and his girlfriend (Virginia Kull), not the back-and-forth emotions between Basil and his father (Basil keeps insisting he despises the man; everyone else keeps telling him he loves the old bastard) and certainly not the clumsy set by Derek McLane which clumps the action of the bedroom center stage, right in the middle of the living room in a confusing, unsatisfying manner.

The one respite is a scene with the powerful executive Mark Herries (Zach Grenier) who might be able to restart the failed merger. Gregor has dug up incriminating info about Herries and a male lover who committed suicide. Delighting in the sort of risks that thrill gamblers (as opposed to businessmen), Gregor drops little hints here and there that lead Herries to believe 1) Gregor knows about the gay double life Herries leads; 2) Gregor is gay himself; 3) that Gregor's son - who goes by Anthony and is cautioned not to refer to Gregor as his dad -- is in fact a male lover; 4) and that Herries would be doing Gregor a favor if he "entertained" this young man at a future date. And all of it is accomplished with Basil aware that something odd is going on but remaining clueless.

Not all the humor and twistedness of this moment is captured (and Rattigan is no Joe Orton, who could have had a blast with the set-up). But it's a rare passage when the show comes fitfully to life. Otherwise, it's as dreary as that Greenwich Village walk-down apartment, from the uninteresting romance at the beginning to the melodramatic yet dull finale. Langella may be a magician on stage, but even magicians need the proper set-up, props and assistants to make their illusions truly come to life.

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**Note:** Michael Giltz was provided with free tickets to this show with the understanding that he would be writing a review.

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- 'Man and Boy' review: Frank Langella is rich in poor play
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