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Michael Giltz, Contributor BookFilter creator

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FULLY COMMITTED ** out of ****

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT ** 1/2 out of ****

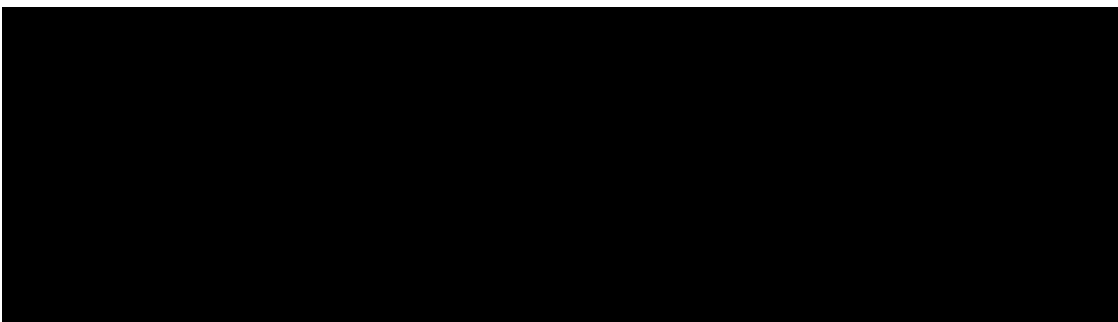
FULLY COMMITTED ** out of ****


LYCEUM THEATRE

Becky Mode's very successful one-person show *Fully Committed* is very familiar. In this showcase for a real actor, they play a would-be actor stuck in his day job: taking reservations from bitchy, super wealthy clients who all want and demand and *expect* to get a table at the hottest restaurant in New York City. On Saturday night. During the Christmas season. At their favorite table. They are not used to hearing the word "no" -- or more specifically their assistants are not used to hearing the word no.

You can chart what will happen, even if like me you missed this comedy during its extended run Off Broadway and in regional theaters around the country. We'll meet a colorful cast of characters, from the egotistical chef to the harried manager. We'll watch him deal with all sorts of customers, from the grumpy to the amusing, the desperate to the (rarely) kind. The would-be actor will naturally also have some career goal in mind, in this case a hoped-for call-back for a role in a play at Lincoln Center. And we'll get a little heart, in this case from the actor's sweetheart of a dad calling from "back home," just hoping his son can make it home for Christmas.

Though the play is filled with little surprises along the way, essentially there are no surprises, just a chance for a talented performer to play everyone from elderly women of privilege to scatter-brained assistants for Gwyneth Paltrow. Since that performer is Emmy nominee Jesse Tyler Ferguson of *Modern Family*, you will probably think "Oh, I like him!" If seeing Ferguson in a show of this sort appeals, by all means go.





Just as predictable as the play is a review of this play on Broadway. No, it doesn't belong on Broadway. Yes, Ferguson is appealing. No, this revival doesn't reveal the play as anything more than a competent showcase.

First, no, it doesn't belong on Broadway. Even at its best, this is a small piece. It would never be a great play, but it would certainly play better in a tiny little venue rather than a big Broadway house. The scenic design of Derek McLane has to fill up the space somehow but it just doesn't work. The story takes place entirely in a cramped, miserable little basement office with exposed pipes and miserable lighting. But there's a stage to fill so McLane must fill it. He offers up a flowing waterfall of wooden restaurant chairs flowing up the roof, a long ramp and a backlit wall filled with wine bottles rising up to the sky. Your eye is constantly drawn away from the tiny little space where all the action takes place and frankly as the tension mounts you can't help wondering why our hero doesn't uncork a bottle or two.

Yes, Ferguson is very appealing. He's been a reliable mainstay at the Public Theater in recent years, charming in all sorts of parts. But this showcase of a play isn't a good showcase for him. Ferguson actually doesn't fill the stage with dozens of characters with his vocal characterizations topping out at about seven or eight. For example, I actually confused two elderly women he plays, thinking the woman who was bringing Malcolm Gladwell as a guest was the same woman insisting she needed a table because she had a major cultural figure dining with her. Turns out I was missing a key element of suspense. Many other characters sort of just blurred together.

It really doesn't matter. Ferguson is so innately appealing you just go with it. So he's not the master of a thousand voices. Who cares? Or so you can imagine his legion of fans saying and rightly so. And he does exude palpable warmth as our hero's dad. Mind you, I was sitting in the fifth row. A fan sitting in the second balcony would have a notably inferior experience however much they liked him. And Laurence Olivier in that role on Broadway wouldn't make it work either.

Mode's play is a solid if workmanlike effort. It leans a little heavily on the revenge fantasy aspect of a peon enjoying their moment of triumph over the bigwigs. It's never more than brisk and amusing. But it accomplishes exactly what it wants: offer up a few chuckles, a few tears and a decent showcase for an actor. It's just a pity Ferguson didn't return to Broadway in a better showcase for his significant skills as an actor.

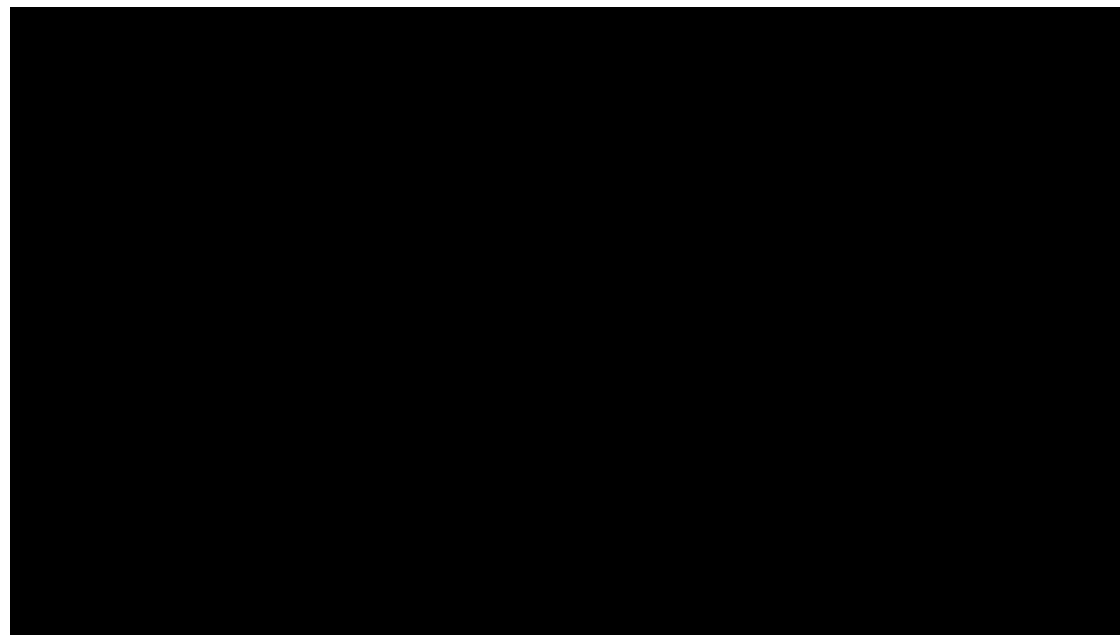
LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT ** 1/2 out of ****

ROUNABOUT THEATRE COMPANY AT AMERICAN AIRLINES THEATRE

If someone has just run a marathon, the last thing you want to do is patronizingly pat them on the shoulder and say, "Not bad!" Unfortunately, that's my response to a solid if not earth-shaking revival of Eugene O'Neill's towering family drama *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. The play is a masterpiece, of course, and its rambling repetitive nature and almost punishing length is part of its brilliance. It has four extremely difficult roles but if they're all perfectly matched that nearly four hour running time flies by. Here the first act is a brisk 90 minutes. To the credit of the cast, the second act of two hours actually passed even more quickly. As Jessica Lange slipped into her final monologue and the lights dimmed, I realized with a start that it was about to end. Three hours and 45 minutes in and I was caught unawares that it was over? Not bad.

It's certainly a bad day for the Tyrones. They're walking on eggshells because Mary Tyrone (Lange) is back from rehab and already showing the warning signs of yearning for another fix of morphine. If that weren't bad enough, Edmund (John Gallagher, Jr.) is coughing away while waiting for confirmation from the doctor that he has consumption and must leave for a sanitarium if he hopes to live. Faded stage actor James Tyrone (Gabriel Byrne) sees his wife slipping away again and the miser in him can't keep from worrying about the expense his son's medical crisis will create. And the drunken older son Jamie (Michael Shannon, on fire) is the only truth teller around, at least when he's not too drunk to stand upright.

They fight. They bicker. They make small talk. They pretend everything is fine. They dance around the obvious. They repeat old grievances and old jokes, almost without knowing the difference between one and the other. In short, they behave like family, albeit an especially poisoned and sad one.



Jonathan Kent directs this enjoyably traditional production with vigor and care, from the slightly askew set of Tom Pye to the mournful sound design of Clive Goodwin. The one odd touch was indicating scene changes

by having a section of curtain slide across the stage, obscuring perhaps a third of the set at its peak, a sort of physical "scene swipe." I went with it.

So we're left with the four leads (Colby Minifie is fine as the servant). Since they didn't gel and scale the heights, one can't help thinking of them individually. John Gallagher Jr. is a terrific actor but somehow simply doesn't feel "period," the way a character from 1912 should. It's his very intonation and spirit, somehow, like Winona Ryder in the film *The Age Of Innocence* where you immediately thought, "No." Despite this, he does nail the fading Edmund's lovely monologue about losing himself when on a ship or alone on a beach, a speech that had the audience quietly captivated.

Gabriel Byrne is also a masterful actor and one who can indeed embody people from different eras. However, I can't describe his James Tyrone very satisfyingly because I don't think Byrne nailed this part down in any specific way. He's not the faded theatrical giant nor is he a broken old man. He's not much of anything, though Byrne did seem most alive when pinching pennies.

The other half of this family fare much better. Lange is using every trick at her disposal to capture the fluttery, fragile Mary Tyrone. Her voice hits about 20 different registers, from childlike to flirtatious to vengeful to bitter to pathetic to resigned and just about any other emotion you can name. It doesn't eclipse the grand eccentricity Vanessa Redgrave seared into my brain during the last acclaimed revival of this work on Broadway. But it's her own wonderful take on one of the great roles in drama.

And Michael Shannon is a joy to behold as the irascible, frustrated Jamie. He's a big hulking presence for much of the show, seeming ungainly and uncomfortable in his body, almost apologizing for being in the way. That is, until he lashes out brutally and uncomfortably, from labeling his own mother a dope fiend to telling his beloved younger brother to beware of the bad influence Jamie is having on him. He's so fully alive in every scene he's in that everyone else raises their game. Whenever Mary is upstairs, the rest of the family nervously awaits her return. Whenever Shannon is offstage, the audience eagerly awaits his. His triumph shakes you out of your complacency and makes you admit that when it comes to an all-consuming work like *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, "not bad" simply isn't good enough.

THEATER OF 2016

Employee Of The Year (Under The Radar at Public) ***

Germinal (Under The Radar At Public) *** 1/2

Fiddler On The Roof 2015 Broadway revival with Danny Burstein ** 1/2

Skeleton Crew ***

Noises Off (2016 Broadway revival) ** but *** if you've never seen it before

The Grand Paradise ***

Our Mother's Brief Affair * 1/2

Something Rotten ***

Sense & Sensibility (Bedlam revival) *** 1/2

Broadway & The Bard * 1/2

Prodigal Son **

A Bronx Tale: The Musical **

Buried Child (2016 revival w Ed Harris) **

Nice Fish ***

Broadway By The Year: The 1930s at Town Hall ***
Hughie **
Pericles (w Christian Camargo) * 1/2
Straight ** 1/2
Eclipsed ***
Red Speedo ***
The Royale ** 1/2
Boy ****
The Robber Bridegroom ***
Hold On To Me, Darling ***
Blackbird ** 1/2
Disaster! *
The Effect ** 1/2
Dry Powder ** 1/2
Head Of Passes ** 1/2
Broadway By The Year: The 1950s *** 1/2
The Crucible (w Ben Wishaw) ***
Bright Star **
She Loves Me (w Laura Benanti) ***
Antlia Pneumatica ** 1/2
RSC at BAM: Richard II (w David Tennant) ** 1/2
RSC at BAM: Henry IV Part I and II (w Antony Sher) ***
RSC at BAM Henry V (w Alex Hassell) ** 1/2
Nathan The Wise ** 1/2
The Father **
American Psycho **
Waitress ** 1/2
Fully Committed ** 1/2
Long Day's Journey Into Night ***

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Note: *Michael Giltz is provided with free tickets to shows with the understanding that he will be writing a review. All productions are in New York City unless otherwise indicated.*