

the village

VOICE

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By Michael Feingold

The Family Business also covers generations of American history—of Jewish assimilation. It too comes in self-contained bits, mostly told directly to the audience. But *The Family Business* is a play—a drama, even, though its mode is the Jewish vaudeville routine, its cross-talk, mishearings, and nonstop monologues perfect objective correlatives, at once hilarious and heartbreaking, for the family conflicts that are its substance. Everything in the script is a metaphor for the actual Gordon family, which wrote (father and son) and performs (add mother) the work, but here the notion of metaphor is itself a breezy family joke, a temporary concept to be put up and shoved aside, like the show's sets—plastic shower curtains on wardrobe racks. The jokiness only increases the pain and pathos of the material: aging and dying, identity (even gay identity),

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and the way family expectations trap us in the social system. Hardly light jovial stuff, you'd think, but the biggest joke of all—papa David Gordon's appearance, mustached and brawny, as the dying elderly aunt—is also the most moving, with a radiance that rises, inexplicably, beyond both laughter and tears. In its brief showings last year, *The Family Business* seemed a treat; after three viewings, I'd call it unforgettable. ■