

THEATER REVIEW



CARP TILL YOU DROP: Valda Setterfield and Ain Gordon in "The Family Business"

'Family Business': As I Lay Kvetching

By **HOWARD KISSEL**

Daily News Drama Critic

THE FAMILY BUSINESS. Written, directed, choreographed and featuring Ain Gordon and David Gordon. With Valda Setterfield. At the New York Theatre Workshop.

IT IS HARD TO THINK OF A GENRE MORE out of fashion than Jewish kitchen-sink drama. Among the numerous achievements of "The Family Business" is that it finds new life in this seemingly outdated form.

Written, directed, choreographed and performed by Ain Gordon and David Gordon (Ain's father), and also featuring Valda Setterfield (David's wife and Ain's mother), "Family Business" tells the story of an old Jewish lady dying and kvetching.

A certain wit comes from this largely sedentary character because she is played by David Gordon, who made his reputation as an innovative dancer. The only animation in the character comes from Gordon's voice, which captures the nuances of kvetching with great precision. As Aunt Annie yells at a succession of caregivers, the effect is funny but never caricature.

In caring for Annie during what is clearly her final illness, her nephew and grandnephew (both played by Ain) come to grips with mortality. They realize how much of their lives have been devoted to doing what they were "supposed to." They finally decide to do what they want. These situations are hardly earthshaking, but they are inventively presented.

Often the actors — especially Ain, as the grandnephew who is writing this play as it proceeds, and Setterfield, as his mother who criticizes his writing — speak with charming self-consciousness directly to the audience. The theatricality is at the end, when the dead aunt speaks to her grandnephew from an upstage ladder, a simple but oddly haunting image.

Despite — or perhaps because of — the frequent ruptures in the fictional fabric, the play is absorbing, funny and ultimately touching.