



Jay Thompson

Medicare cuts: Ain Gordon and David Gordon in "The Family Business."

## THE FAMILY BUSINESS

at the Mark Taper Forum

Reviewed by Jamie Painter

Living up to its title, *The Family Business* is written, directed, and performed by David Gordon and his son Ain. Joining them onstage is Valda Setterfield, David's wife and Ain's mother. Together this family of performers spins a drama about the business of growing old. While its roots are in theatre, the production borrows from performance art, slapstick, and the Gordons' own family history.

David Gordon plays 78-year-old Annie Kinsman, a childless widow no longer able to care for herself. Going in and out of hospitals and torturing one home-care nurse after another, Annie depends on the charity of her nephew Phil and his son Paul (both played by Ain). With only a few barrettes in his hair and a horrid housecoat, David utterly captures the neurosis and



chutzpah of Annie, whose character is based on David's deceased aunt.

Ain Gordon skillfully portrays three generations in a family of plumbers with only two props, a fedora, and a pair of Groucho glasses. As Mrs. Wonderful, the loyal girl Friday at the plumbing company, Setterfield shines and adds a great deal of humor. Setterfield also capably fills the shoes of supporting characters from doctor to nurse to waitress.

In real life, plumbing does not run in the Gordon clan, but creativity does. Minimalist is the key word in this production. Like a building designed to expose the pipes along a ceiling, the performers make intentional efforts to expose their bag of tricks. The sparse set, comprised of shower curtains, cardboard boxes, and a few pieces of furniture, makes an appropriate accompaniment to the structure and style of the production.

*The Family Business* is an odd experiment that succeeds because of its freshness. More than a comment on Medicare and old age, the play addresses a larger subject: the ties of guilt, responsibility, love, and longing that bind family members together.

*"The Family Business,"* presented by the Center Theatre Group in association with the New York Theatre Workshop/Pick Up Performance Company at the Mark Taper Forum, 135 N. Grand Ave., Los Angeles. Dec. 3-24. (213) 365-3500.

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