

## E1

By Jim Farber  
THEATER CRITIC

It's remarkable how the theme of growing up Jewish in New York City continues to supply endless story lines for novels, plays and films.

The situations and the time periods may change, but the notion of the insular Jewish family wracked by alternating waves of love, guilt, anger and resentment — surrounded by a general atmosphere of total absurdity — remains the same. The latest theatrical portrait of the artist as a young Jew to make its way to Los Angeles (compliments of the Center Theatre Group of the Mark Taper Forum) is "The Family Business."

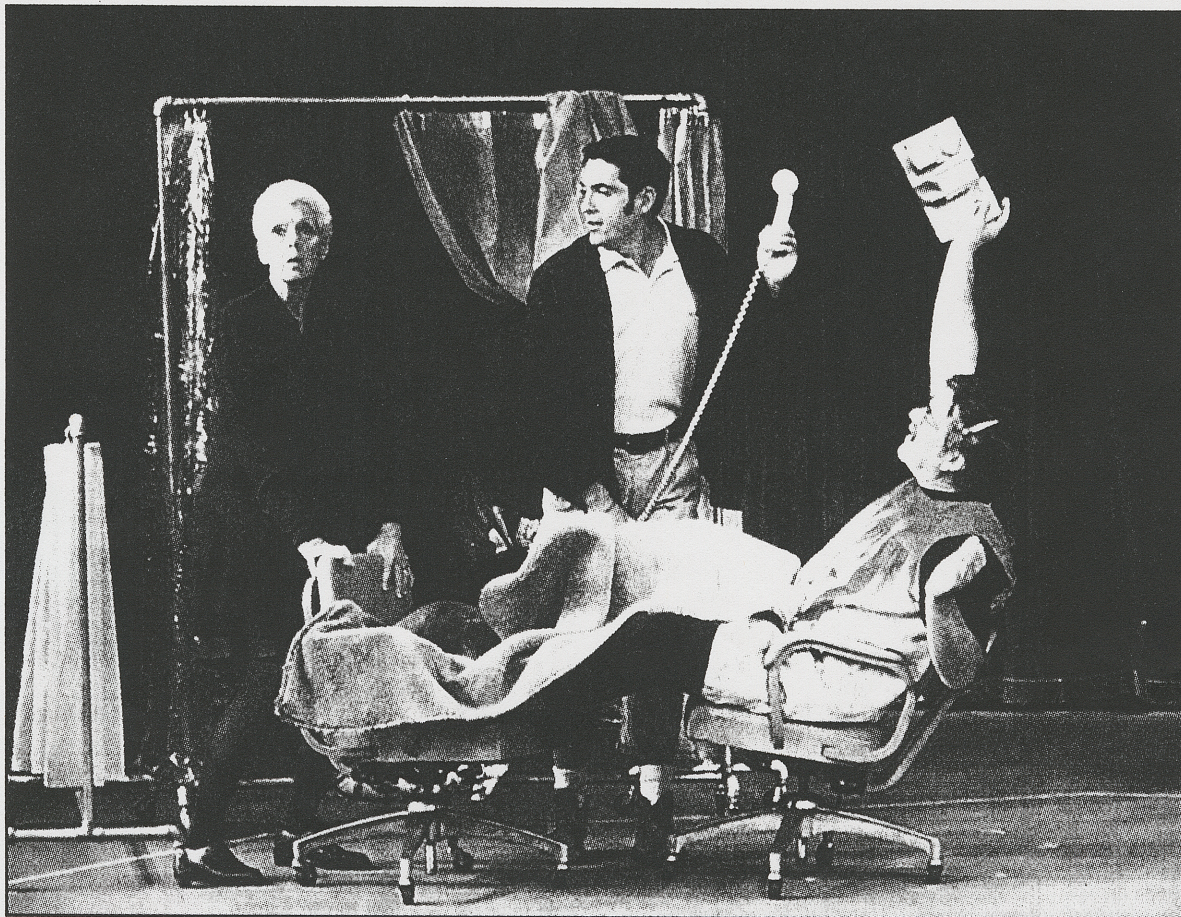
It's a cleverly designed little comedy written, directed and starring the father/son team of David and Ain Gordon, assisted by wife/mother Valda Setterfield. Collectively they're known as the Pick Up Performance Company.

The story, which unfolds in a scattergun manner often approaching the manic energy and comic exaggeration of burlesque, recounts the ups and downs of three generations of a Jewish immigrant family.

Limited to three actors, the cast accomplishes this feat by changing characters at the drop of a hat.

As the play opens, Paul (Ain Gordon), the latest son to be drawn into the family plumbing business, is summoned to the home of his aged Great Aunt Annie, who is played with little regard to gender by David Gordon. She has fallen down and can't get up.

For the next two hours the plot is dominated by the relationship between this sickly, constantly complaining 78-year-old woman and her homosexual nephew, as well as her



Valda Setterfield, right, Ain Gordon and David Gordon star in "Family Business."

## FAMILY AFFAIR

Father-mother-son team revisits the growing-up-Jewish theme in 'The Family Business' at the Taper



The family team of Ain Gordon, left, David Gordon and Valda Setterfield keep the play going at a break-neck pace.



Ain Gordon, left, and David Gordon manage to pull off a combination of roles (and sexes) in "Family Business."



Simple props and scenery help to quickly create a number of scenes in the lives of a New York family.

## STAGE REVIEW

**What:** "The Family Business"

**When:** 8 tonight - Fri., 2:30 and 8 p.m. Sat., 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. Sun. through Dec. 24

**Where:** The Mark Taper Forum, 135 N. Grand Ave., Los Angeles.

**Tickets:** \$28-\$35.50.

**Information:** (213) 365-3500.

older nephew and a string of nurses and doctors.

The interaction evolves into a classic push-

me/pull-you confrontation, where feelings of love and commitment are set against a rising tide of resentment and hostility.

Convincing and emotionally resonant one moment, totally absurd and alienating the next, the action proceeds at a pace that boggles the senses. Locations change in a flash, by the simple rearrangement of a series of brightly colored shower curtains, and sometimes it's hard to remember who's on first.

Ain Gordon, much like the central character in a Woody Allen film or Neil Simon play, portrays the young man desperately seeking his own identity. As if beset by the furies, he feels trapped by his involvement in the family business (he has artistic aspirations) and crazed by the conflicting feelings of love, obligation and hostility he has toward his old aunt (who he is convinced is eating him alive).

David Gordon, despite his prominent mustache, is remarkably convincing as Annie Kinsman — the kvetch in aunt's clothing. Like a sympathetic Gorgon, he captures the anger and frustration that comes with getting old.

Setterfield is wonderful in her various roles as the company's ever-efficient secretary, Mrs. Wonder, and all the other necessary female roles. She even becomes a siren-wailing, tire-screaming ambulance.

In the great lexicon of Jewish literature, "The Family Business" may not provide any brilliant new insights. But it does offer a bounty of enjoyable, thought-provoking moments.