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The Assembled Parties

by Daniel Scheffler

EDGE Contributor

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Jessica Hecht, Jeremy Shamos and Judith Light (Source:Joan Marcus)

In what we know to be a complex family situation, stationed so aptly on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, the masterful play **"Assembled Parties"** rams together two generations of family complete with their own quips, their very own way of dealing with velvety remorse, and most of all their own learnt Jewish drama.

The play, a promulgation of love and how love cannot be contained, judged, or even quantified, brings together contemporary feelings and emotions through its intensity of familiar very important moments -- recognizable by every audience member.

Act 1 is set in 1980 ironically at a Christmas Day celebration, with the glamorous fashion and horrific

interior décor consummately perked as we meet the Bascoys. But first we meet Jeff (played by Jeremy Shamos), the best friend of their young son, whose awkwardness seems to propel him to try to be a better man, as opposed to allowing him to fade into the abyss of the times.

Spending this golden age with the Bascoy family, Jeff is heavily dragged in the middle of confrontations between his friend Scottie (played by the soap opera stud Jake Silbermann) and his parental unit Ben (played by an almost stern but irreverent Jonathan Walker) and Julie (the chameleon Jessica Hecht).



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Scottie's love interests both fascinate and confuse his parents and Jeff uses these to philander with the visiting family that represents a liberalism that he possibly doesn't know back home -- one jocular phone call home away. But it is Julie's charming nature, the lull in her voice and her flirty ways that probably keeps Jeff that close.

But the action really becomes absolutely hysterical and genially smart in the most fortifying way when Faye (the vanquisher of the play -- Judith Light, complete with Yiddish jests) arrives at the most enormous apartment in all of New York. The characters all seem to lose their way around the apartment, as it symbolizes the losing of their way in their minds, and then in their complicated lives.

Thoughtfully, and this is evident in the entire play's ambit, the playwright Richard Greenberg edited parts of the play that referenced Boston and bombings for the New York current run.

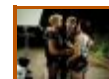
With the neurotic Faye comes her not-so-smart daughter Shelley (played by big-eyed Lauren Blumenfeld) and her seemingly well-behaved husband Morty (Mark Blum). The daughter embarrasses her parents with her inability to rally up some intellect. The play slowly reveals just how far Morty would go for his crazed wife without her knowledge as he too liberates himself from the chains of family-life.

Then there is Faye, the good mother, who immediately tries to pair Jeff and her daughter. But the dinner table seems to be a much more attractive locus for Jeff as family secrets, rubies and all, are revealed and then, of course, hushed up.

Act 2, Christmas Day again but 20 years later finds only some of the now familiar characters remain. Julie, still charming, still privileged and overly protected from the real world, is now heading towards a serious winter of her life. Finding herself still in the now run-down apartment tucked away high up on Manhattan island, she has lost her son Scottie, her husband and perhaps is losing her mind.

But it is Faye, the eternal optimist and saver of the day, that brings forth love and light into the family as she releases her ridiculous guilt that weighed her down and aged her so and picks up sunshine that ultimately brings a Yiddish Christmas cheer to the family that remains. Even when her heinous daughter calls to spew guilt on Faye, it is with certainty that she liberates herself from the binds of family compunction.

It was perhaps cheap, and so wonderfully easy, to use the Bush administration as part of a running joke in the play. It may be funny now, years on, but at the time it was scary for all Americans. Consumed with oil greed, Texas cupidity spread across America from the inside out, from the White House and beyond and the liberals and freedom fighters were in fear as the Republican with no soul took over almost all control. The joke is perhaps cheap, but indeed necessary to remind audiences just how bad decisions will always be made by human folk and will just continue to be made -- just as in the play.



Director Derek Cianfrance's newest film, "The Place Beyond the Pines" is epic in scope - covering two generations of cops & criminals in Schenectady, NY. EDGE spoke to the director about how his film, which stars Ryan Gosling & Bradley Co...



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Thoughtfully, and this is evident in the entire play's ambit, the playwright Richard Greenberg edited parts of the play that referenced Boston and bombings for the New York current run. The play, set pre-9/11, feels deliberate about its attack on the Bush administration but remains vigilant of avoiding the "war on terror" and the horrific Twin Towers situation -- possibly holding itself back from a critique on Bush, and his henchmen, coupled with September 11.

The play cannot run dry, and never overheats with emotions as it stretches itself out comfortably and confidently over a kitsch chaise lounge and stows itself in an even-keeled manner with the best results Broadway can possibly produce. The shrewd gags and the Jewish manners admix to produce a most "BaTampete" production.

"Assembled Parties" runs through June 2 at the Samuel J. Friedman Theater, 261 West 47th Street in Manhattan. For information and tickets, call 212-239-6200 or visit telecharge.com.

Daniel Scheffler is a writer who spends his time in New York, Cape Town and India. Follow him on Twitter @danielscheffler

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