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Off-Bway Critics Approve of Harmon's Significant Other



With scathing dialogue and nasty characters, Joshua Harmon wowed critics three years ago when his *Bad Jews* opened at the Roundabout Underground space. Months later, the show, which New York Post critic Elizabeth Vincentelli called, “delicious, nasty fun,” moved to the Roundabout’s Laura Pels Theater, where it racked up three Outer Critics Circle nominations (including New off-Broadway play) and a Lucille Lortel Award for the lead actress.

Buoyed by that prior success, the Roundabout turns to Harmon again, this time for *Significant Other*, a lighter comedy which opened Thursday night (June 18) at the Laura Pels. Are critics as gung ho for romantic Others as they were for angry Jews?

Variety’s Marilyn Stasio sure is. She notes that here, Harmon writes in “an equally intelligent but more bittersweet vein,” but still comes up with a “frightfully funny relationship comedy” that is “flawlessly cast” and features “the irresistibly lovable Gideon Glick.”

“Entirely delightful,” kvells **New York Times** scribe **Charles Isherwood** about *Significant Others*. He adds that “the production directed with nimble grace by Trip Cullman, is as richly funny as it is ultimately heart-stirring.” Like Stasio, he also lauds Glick’s “wonderful emotional elasticity” that “grounds the comedy in emotional truth.”

More on the fence is **Vulture.com’s Jesse Green**, who reminds readers that *Bad Jews* was terrific, while Harmon’s script for the recent Radio City Spectacular was “a monumental assault on human decency.” He worries that the “overblown” nature of the Rockette misadventure has infected Harmon’s current writing: “Unfortunately, nice or even exquisite writing doesn’t make a play, as the trumped-up climax in the second act proves.” He also carps, “When a play lacks dramatic tension, a director can only supply so much; you can’t get a grip on gas. But in this case, oddly, the production, by Trip Cullman, seems at pains to emphasize rather than disguise the inertia.”

Entertainment Weekly’s Jessica Shaw also has reservations. In her “B”-rated review, she notes, “the dialogue here is sharp, unapologetic and witty,” but she worries that “Hollywood rom-com” treacle will gunk up the works. It doesn’t, and she expresses gratitude for that

Steven Suskin of **HuffPo** calls the play “another smart, laugh-a-minute contemporary comedy” from an author “who has a knack for *very* funny dialogue” (*italics his*). Suskin also applauds director Trip Cullman for helping the play move “fluidly” and veteran actress Barbara Barrie’s “simply lovely performance.” “Keep `em Coming, Mr. Harmon,” Suskin encourages.

Equally laudatory is **The Hollywood Reporter’s Kevin Rooney** who appreciates the comedy’s “wit, warmth and the unmistakable pang of personal experience.” It proves that Harmon is “no one-hit wonder,” as the new play becomes “a perceptive gay male variation on female-centric screen comedies about corrosive relationship envy.”

Both Steven Suskin and **New York Post** critic **Elisabeth Vincentelli** see hints of the musical *Company* in *Significant Other*, keyed by the presence of actress Barrie but also by the single, awkward guy pushed to the side of friendships and romantic entanglements. In her *** (out of four) review, Vincentelli adds that under director Cullman’s direction, “appealing actors mine every drop of comedy and pathos from the script — which, underneath its brashness, is at heart fairly conventional.”

In his **** (out of *****) critique for **Time Out**, **Adam Feldman** calls the play “like *The Heidi Chronicles* minus the feminist history.” He notes that this is, “as funny as Harmon’s breakthrough play, *Bad Jews*, but less pushy in its message. *Significant Other* makes you slap your knees until you notice they’re bruised.”

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