

THEATER REVIEW

LITTLE DOC

Written by Dan Klores
Directed by John Gould Rubin
Rattlestick Playwrights Theater
224 Waverly Place
www.rattlestick.org

Review by Christopher Zara

Every American demographic eventually faces that disheartening moment, that wake-up call when its affiliates look around at their contemporaries and realize, much to their dismay, that their generation has already peaked. For the baby boomers, if we are to believe the testimony of playwright Dan Klores, that moment came sometime around 1975, the year in which his wavering new drama, *Little Doc*, takes place. The play centers on a group of longtime friends who are approaching 30, which is to say they are coming down from the high that accompanies being young and having the world as their oyster. The days of political activism and Vietnam War protests have given way to extended hang-out sessions at the Brooklyn apartment of Ric, played by Adam Driver, a hard-headed burnout who spends much of the play complaining about, or arguing with, his equally hard-headed father, played by Steven Marcus. Ric announces early on that he and his girlfriend, Peggy (Joanne Tucker),

are going on a road trip, but when it is revealed that he has not yet paid back a sizable debt to his father's friend Manny (Dave Tawil), suspicion begins to mount that Ric is looking to skip town for good. *Little Doc*, while not quite a talking-heads piece, contains a fair amount of talking, but this is really its most enjoyable attribute. As the young friends banter, their conversations shift quickly from playful ruminations about the good old days to mean-spirited bickering over old grievances. Because they know each other so well, they are experts at pushing each other's buttons, and their precarious exchanges will ring true for anyone who has ever been part of an overextended social clique. Klores, whose roots are in documentary filmmaking, is adept at spitting out taut dialogue and creating genuine moments of dramatic intensity, but he hasn't quite mastered the more basic craft of storytelling. His plot veers into several different directions involving Ric's relationship with his father and his debt to Manny — an aging mobster who treats Ric like his own son. Through it all, however, we mostly find ourselves wanting to see more of the central clique. The young friends'

nihilistic jousting shows a rarely seen side of the baby boom generation, whose cohorts are known less for their cynicism and more for patting themselves on the back and bragging about how cool Woodstock was. *Little Doc* proves that the boomers, for all their idealism and ambition to change the world, also had their fair share of disillusionment. Like the Gen-X slackers who came a few years later and the recession-weary Millennials of today, Klores's boomers face the end of their youth with clenched teeth, angry that no one had warned them of their limitations. As this was the first American generation to grow up with the opportunities provided by postwar economic prosperity, it was also the first to squander those opportunities. And while Klores poignantly reminds us of this, he then goes on to squander opportunities of his own. The more compelling aspects of *Little Doc* are treated as a subplot, while the playwright pours an unnecessary amount of energy into Ric's possible betrayal of Manny. As the wounded father figure confronts the fallen hero, we realize we've seen this type of climax many times before, and Klores brings nothing new to the device. Still, this pitfall doesn't stand in the way of *Little Doc's* first-rate cast, whose combined graces make the play well worth its 90-minute running time. While the central character of Ric is self-serving and, at times, downright underhanded, Driver keeps him likeable in a spacey, Zach Braff kind of way, and by his final monologue, we can't help but



DOPESICK Bill Tangradi and Tobias Segal in *Little Doc*.

root for Ric's redemption. Tobias Segal, who plays the group's requisite spaz, Billy, isn't given much to do outside of a few comic non sequiturs, but he readily handles the role's one-note humor. Early in the play, we catch a small glimpse of Segal's true dramatic range when Billy nods off, chillingly, into a womblike stupor, a fresh syringe full of junk coursing through his veins. Bill Tangradi as Lenny, the quixotic hippie whose grand plans for free love haven't quite panned out, is the standout of the cast. While Lenny's preset smugness makes him sharply critical of his friends' sedentary lifestyle, it's hard not to notice that he isn't doing much with his own life aside from popping Quaaludes and dealing coke. And yet Tangradi's keen awareness of these contradictory traits fleshes Lenny out in a way that makes us wish the character had a larger role in the story. Somewhere between the Summer of Love and the inauguration of Bill Clinton — the first president born after World War II — the baby boomers learned to look back on their youth with an inflated sense of accomplishment. *Little Doc*, if nothing else, adds balance to the conversation. It assures us that every generation has its underachievers.



STAGE BRIEFLY

Theater dispatches from around the Tri-State Area

MIDTOWN

EAST VILLAGE

Lying Lincoln

BlueRare Productions presents *Abraham Lincoln's Big, Gay Dance Party*, a politically charged mash-up comedy written by Aaron Loeb. During a fourth-grade Christmas pageant in Lincoln's rural Illinois hometown, Honest Abe's sexuality is called into question, sparking a controversy that allows a uniquely American story to unfold. The production is directed by Chris Smith and stars Arnie Burton, Stephanie Pope Caffey and Robert Hogan, among others.

Begins six-week limited engagement July 27
Acorn Theatre. 410 West 42nd St. Call (212) 279-4200 or visit www.ticketcentral.com.

CHELSEA

TRIBECA

Irish Toast

The Irish Repertory Theatre presents a special engagement of *The Irish... and How They Got That Way* to honor the one-year anniversary of the passing of Frank McCourt, the play's Pulitzer Prize-winning author. With much of the same humor and irony that McCourt was so famous for including in his critically acclaimed biographies, he provides a history of the Irish in America through classical songs and stories. Original cast members Ciaran Sheehan and Terry Donnelly recreate the roles they originated in the production's world premiere in 1997, while Charlotte Moore directs.

July 14–September 5 *The Irish Repertory Theatre*. 132 West 22nd St. (btw. 6th and 7th Avenues). Call (212) 727-2737 or visit www.irishrep.org.

Fashion Blowout

The 11th Annual Midtown International Theatre Festival presents the premiere of *Blow by Blow*, a play based on the life of British style icon Isabella Blow. Written by Jean Grillo and directed by Jen Forcino, the production tells the tragic story of the provocative, fearsome, but somehow still lovable woman who was editor of British Vogue and was renowned for her wild attire and unique hats. Costume designer Susan Voelker will create many designs inspired by Blow's outlandish wardrobe choices, including recreations of famed Philip Treacy headpieces.

July 21, 24, 25 *Jewel Box Theatre*. 130 W. 29th St. Call (866) 811-4111 or visit www.midtownfestival.org.

Los Angeles, I'm Yours

East River Comedia presents *LA Party* as part of the 4th Annual Undergroundzero Festival. Written and spoken by David Barlow and directed by Phil Soltanoff, it tells the story of a fanatical vegan who slides off the wagon one night, falling headfirst into a wild L.A. bender. Alongside Barlow and Soltanoff, the production is performed by Ilan Bachrach, Stephen Brady, Kristine Oakes and Claire Siebers.

July 7–11 *Performance Space 122*. 150 1st Ave. at E. 9th St. Call (212) 352-3101 or visit www.ps122.org.

Got Milf?

AF Productions presents the world premiere of *Sex in Mommyville*, written and performed by Anna Fishbeyn. A musical feminist comedy directed by Sande Shurin, the production follows the adventures of a neurotic, guilt-ridden, health-conscious, sex-starved Manhattan mom as she tries to please her high-maintenance children, her lawyer-husband and her Russian parents all at once. Somewhere along the way, she discovers what it means to be a mother and a woman in today's demanding society.

August 18–29 *The Flea*. 41 White St. Call (212) 352-3101 or visit www.theflea.org.

CONNECTICUT

Where the Girls Are

The Sherman Playhouse presents the Tony Award-winning comedy-drama, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, written by Jay Presson Allen. Based on the novel by Muriel Spark, it is the story of a headstrong, passionate, eccentric teacher at a private school for girls in the 1930s who chooses to teach her students of love, politics and art — all of the things she thinks are important — rather than the mundane curriculum. Directed by Jane Farnol, the production stars Noel Desiato, David Hutchinson, David Almquist and Liz Hawley, among others.

July 9–10, 16–18, 23–25, 30–31 *The Sherman Playhouse*. 5 Route 39 North (at the intersection of Route 37 and 39), Sherman. Call (860) 354-3622 or visit www.shermanplayers.org.

—COMPILED BY JULIANA APPENRODT