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“Jewish Is Hard”

07/07/2014 - 17:13
Emily Snyder

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There are two things you should never discuss: politics and religion.

However, those are really the only two things worth talking about.

“The Religion Thing,” a new play by [Renee Calarco](#) (<http://www.reneecalarco.com/>) and directed by Douglas Hall, tackles the politics and lasting impact of faith.



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Katharine McLeod and Jamie Geiger in “The Religion Thing.”
Photo by Jimmy Ryan

Focusing on two Washington, D.C. couples: Mo (Katherine McLeod) and Brian (Jamie Geiger) —an intermarried Catholic-Jewish duo -- and Mo’s best friend Patti (Danielle O’Farrell) who has been “born-again” to please her new boyfriend, Jeff (Andrew W. Smith).

As with any good character study, secrets come tumbling out within the first few minutes: Patti used to be a party girl; she and Jeff were secretly married at a mega-church; she’s quitting her high-powered job to have children—and much more that we won’t spoil here. But as each piece of the quartet is revealed, what comes to the fore is the importance of faith—and the impact of faith upon our most important life decisions.

Brian, whose Judaism has been non-observant at best, finds that as he and Mo discuss having children, the idea of a bris, a bar mitzvah, attending Kol Nidre, actually do mean something to him. However, as an act two spectral visitation from his orthodox grandfather reminds him (Curran Connor, pulling quadruple duty in various roles): “Jewish is hard.”

“Jewish is hard,” but Calarco’s script is tight, funny, honest and painful by turns. Complimented by Hall’s direction (greatly assisted by Kevin Judge’s clever mobile set), the quintet of actors revel in the uncomfortable intimacy that grappling with faith requires. This particular presentation is further heightened by a gallery display from Israeli photographer, Yael Ben-Zion from her new book, “Intermarried.”

Society’s pervasive message remains: “You can have it all.” But “The Religion Thing”

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reminds us that faith is more than fuzzy feelings: true faith is hard.

“*The Religion Thing*,” produced by [Project Y Theatre Company](#), (<https://www.facebook.com/ProjectYTheatre>) is playing at [The Cell Theatre](#) (<http://www.thecelltheatre.org/>), 338 West 23rd Street, New York City through August 1st. Tickets available through [brownpapertickets.com](#). (<http://brownpapertickets.com>)

Emily C. A. Snyder is an internationally published and produced playwright, as well as the Artistic Director of Turn to Flesh Productions. Her original five-act iambic pentameter play, “*Cupid and Psyche*,” premiered at The Barrow Group Theatre for Valentine’s 2014. She is a member of the staff of The Jewish Week.

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