

Putting on designer genes without any zip

JONATHAN Tolins's play not only deals in Brave New World eugenics, but also raises an absolutely fascinating hypothesis which the dramatist then leaves to float in the air. The *Twilight of the Golds*, first seen in America four years ago, was inspired by scientific researchers claiming to have identified a distinctly gay gene in some homosexual bodies.

Tolins's retort to this doubtful discovery was to hypothesise about a future in which a pregnant woman could take tests to discover whether her impending offspring was likely to be that shocking combination — male and homosexual.

Tolins also exploits the fact that religious fundamentalists and homophobes of the world have already united to argue that in the future women might have the right to abort gay foetuses. Other coincidences conveniently abound in the play. Tolins's heroine, Suzanne (a distraught Gina Bellman) is conveniently married to a doctor in the thick of gay genetic research and has an adored homosexual theatre-designer brother, David Gold.

Consciences, principles and family relations are, therefore, set to be tested and tormented, particularly as the family is close-knit Jewish. Suzanne's conventional parents — Sheila

Twilight of the Golds
Arts Theatre

NICHOLAS DE JONGH

Allen, the anxious mother, and Peter Laird, bellowing bizarrely as daddy, are on hand. So there's an excruciating hour of aimless family chatter, ungay banter and confessional monologues before Suzanne's husband breaks the news of what the genes foretell.

Worse, Tolins forges a glib parallel between the Gods of Wagner's Ring (beloved of opera-queen David) and the Gold family. Tim Shortall's set compounds the pretentiousness by making a New York apartment look symbolically shattered. David — played by Jason Gould as a personable, tousle-headed charmer rather than a passionate gay activist — is given frail arguments to dissuade his sister from aborting. There's no exciting clash of wills or prejudices either.

Suzanne's unput case, which needs answering, has to do with parental fears of a son suffering for his gayness in childhood and after. Is her decision to abort a step towards suppression of human diversity and potential or an offence against humanity? I'd answer "yes" — passionately. But Tolins's skimpy arguments and Polly James's limp production never fortify my belief.

● Box office: 0171 836 3334.

Ratings: No stars — adequate

★ good, ★★ very good,

★★★ outstanding, X poor

Twilight de Jongh Standard



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