

## Young American proves there's drama outside the trailer park

THE OTHER week, I viciously attacked the first two plays in the Donmar Warehouse's *American Topographics* season, and suggested that when it comes to new dramatic writing, the Brits are now knocking the Americans into a cocked hat.

I suspected then that I was offering a hostage to fortune and so it proves with the third and final play, Richard Greenberg's *Three Days of Rain*.

It is a terrific piece — civilised, witty, touching and cunningly structured. It is also unashamedly middle-class, and one realises with a start just how rare adult, middle-class values are in new plays by young dramatists these

days. Greenberg belongs to the urbane tradition of Albee, Stoppard and Hampton rather than the "trailer-park trash" school, and if he can maintain work of this standard, his future looks exceptionally bright.

The play is driven by a strong plot involving an inheritance, and the action starts in New York in 1995, where Walker is meeting his sister Nan. They are the thirty-something children of a hugely rich architect who died the previous year, and sensible, down-to-earth Nan (Elizabeth McGovern)

is furious with her wired, neurotic brother (Colin Firth) because he went AWOL for months and didn't even attend the funeral.

Walker has always resented his father Ned's refusal to talk, to open up emotionally, and this resentment increases when he discovers his father's journal of 55 years earlier, only to find that it consists of little more than a terse recitation of facts. We also learn that Nan and Walker's mother, Lina, is mentally unstable, and meet Pip (David Morrissey), a handsome actor who is the son

### Theatre

#### Three Days of Rain Donmar Warehouse

of Ned's former partner, Theo. The dramatic crisis in act one comes when it is discovered that instead of bequeathing his most famous work, a beautiful "prison-like" house, to his children, Ned has actually left it to Pip. Why?

In the second half we go back 55 years, to 1960, when Ned and Theo were first setting up as architects and working on the house that was

to establish their fame and fortune. With a marvellously effective use of doubling, the same actors are cast as the parents of the characters they have just played in the first half. The device doesn't just offer a chance for a smashing cast to show off their versatility, it also sharply points up the tyrannies — and occasional mercies — of genetic inheritance.

The play is full of surprises, for Greenberg's theme (it is one he shares with Stoppard) is just how easy it is for the present to misinterpret the past. Ned, for instance,

couldn't be more wrong about his father's failure in emotion, as is shown by the lovely depiction of blossoming love between Ned and Lina during three days of torrential New York rain.

But the play's time sequence is shatteringly sad. The drama ends in a glow of romance and hope. But that was in 1960. Having already followed the families to 1995, we are keenly aware of the faultlines in the relationships and know just how quickly happiness soured.

Firth is superb as both the screwed-up, bullying Walker, bril-

liantly suggesting the egomania of unhappiness, and as Walker's humble, painfully stammering father, a performance that goes straight to the viewer's heart. McGovern is especially fine as Lina, tremblingly caught between passion and panic, while as Pip, David Morrissey triumphantly proves that it is possible to make niceness dramatically interesting.

It's a marvellously rewarding play, full of warm humour and sharp wit as well as sadness, and Robin Lefevre's attentive, beautifully acted production does it proud.

Tickets: 0171 369 1732

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