

# The time, the place, the man

Three Days of Rain ★  
Donmar Warehouse

NICHOLAS DE JONGH

**D**ECADES after JB Priestley used the theatre to play poignant and significant games with time, Richard Greenberg creates most arresting variations on Priestley's original theme. The third act of Priestley's *Time and the Conways* achieved unusual pathos, since linear chronology had been defied and the audiences had already seen what would happen to the characters' high hopes. But Greenberg's *Three Days of Rain* simply begins in New York, 1995, and then retreats 30 years. The challenging idea is to demonstrate how biology may give a helping hand to destiny, how the sins or rather our parents' traits and decisions may play shaping parts in our lives.

The first act, with its flippant wit, has an eye to the past. Colin Firth's Walker, son of the mildly famous but rich architect, Ned, returns out of the blue having missed his father's funeral, to face the recriminating music that time plays in the wake of an important death. Since Walker's married sister, Nan, meets him in a house that Ned built with his partner, Theo, and Theo's son, Pip, is also on hand, the play looks all too neatly set up for pained reminiscing.

Robin LeFevre's cannily understated production, which I saw at a preview, tantalises with its air of tight-fisted tensions. The concealed truth is about to be forced into the open. When



Alastair Muir

Transcending TV's erotic appeal: Colin Firth, with Elizabeth McGovern, in *Three Days of Rain*

the play concertinas back to 1960s and the two men play their fathers, with Elizabeth McGovern's Nan completing the emotional triangle as her own mother, you come to understand how the sexual and emotional patterns of the next generation have been set.

The force of Colin Firth's remarkable acting transcends the mere erotic appeal that on television made him the fantasy play-thing of so many women. He portrays two men who loiter on the fringes of life, brooding over how to find the key to happiness. Firth's valiantly worn

dejection always rings true. Dowdily dressed in despondency, an almost thread-bare charm and a long, grey-green pull-over as Walker, and then in the role of his bespectacled, stammering and introverted father, the less brilliant architect, Firth illuminates both men's diffidence and pain. Miss McGovern wears a vibrant sexiness, but remains enigmatically buttoned up. David Morrissey's Pip most powerfully shows how we may speak the most painful home truths in the mildest tones.

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