



ODE TO PLATH & PINTER: (left to right) Jake Gyllenhaal, Michelle Gomez, Annie Funke, Brian F. O'Byrne. Photo: Joan Marcus



## *Theater Review*

# *If There Is I Haven't Found It Yet* **Jake Gyllenhaal, Annie Funke shine in British import**

**IF THERE IS I HAVEN'T FOUND IT YET**

**By Nick Payne**

**Directed by Michael Longhurst**

**Through November 25, 2012**

**Laura Pels Theatre in the Harold and Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre  
111 West 46th St.**

**(212-719-1300), [www.roundabouttheatre.org](http://www.roundabouttheatre.org)**

**By Scott Harrah**

One wonders why a Hollywood star like Oscar nominee Jake Gyllenhaal signed on to perform in a UK import as flimsy and heavy-handed as this. Those expecting to see a first-rate vehicle for an actor of Mr. Gyllenhaal's stature might be disappointed, as this dark tale of family discord and existential realism, set in Scotland, is geared more toward experimental theater aficionados than mainstream movie lovers.

On the surface, the show, first produced in 2009 at London's Bush Theatre, seems like a typical tale of self-indulgent people in serious denial, loaded with clichés about the angst-ridden travails of the British middle class. Stories of unhappy families and suicidal teenager girls are nothing new. Some scenes seem lifted straight out of Sylvia Plath's classic teen weeper *The Bell Jar*, with a few shades of Harold Pinter's domestic sexual tension and malaise thrown in for good, pseudo intellectual measure. Yet playwright Nick Payne's occasionally crisp dialogue and melodramatic narrative packs enough of a wallop that it curiously transcends an otherwise middling story of a deteriorating family.

Mr. Gyllenhaal, giving one of his most challenging performances ever (complete with a thick, authentic Scottish brogue), plays Terry, the estranged brother of environmentalist writer George (Tony winner Brian F. O'Byrne). Terry shows up unannounced at the home of his brother, sister-in-law Fiona (Michelle Gomez), and overweight, emotionally distraught, 15-year-old niece, Anna (Annie Funke).

Mr. O'Byrne's George and Ms. Gomez's Fiona are not exactly likable characters. George is obsessed with writing a book about climate change, while Fiona, a teacher, is equally icy and self-absorbed; both seem oblivious to the heartbreaking problems their own daughter is enduring at school. The role of

George is definitely unlike anything previously done by Mr. O'Byrne, perhaps best known to New Yorker theatergoers as the serial killer in *Frozen* (for which he received the Tony in 2004) to *The Coast of Utopia*, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* and *Doubt*, among others. Scottish actress Michelle Gomez, however, fails to give the character of Fiona the requisite depth and sensitivity to make us empathize with her struggles as a working mother and frustrated wife.

It almost does not matter, though, because *If There Is I Haven't Found It Yet* is essentially Mr. Gyllenhaal and Miss Funke's show. After fighting back with one of the kids bullying her, Anna is suspended from school and left at home with her unorthodox uncle. The chemistry between Mr. Gyllenhaal and Miss Funke is thoroughly natural and, at times, oddly touching. Anna finds a kindred spirit in her raffish uncle, with his penchant for marijuana, alcohol and swearing.

He seems to be the only member of the family who understands her fragile mental state and low self-esteem. The scenes between the two make the story plausible and give the play its *raison d'être*, but it would spoil the story to go into detail as to why.

Playwright Nick Payne's script is filled with thematic holes and a lot of metaphors, most of which are confusing and ultimately unsatisfying. His attempts at dark humor and statements about saving the world, the meaning of life, and volatile human relationships are often too obtuse to make much sense.

*If There Is I Haven't Found It Yet* is a disturbing, highbrow potboiler that is sometimes too intense, convoluted and overwrought for its own good. Regardless, Mr. Gyllenhaal and Miss Funke manage to give two remarkable performances.

***Edited by Scott Harrah***

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