

# What makes *Bad Jews* good?

 By [Terry Levin](#)

19 Dec 2016

Maybe the title of this sitcom style play currently on at Cape Town's Fugard Theatre was meant to be deliberately provocative. Maybe the 33-year-old New York City based playwright Joshua Harmon really thinks the characters in the play he wrote in 2012 are irredeemably badass. Whatever the case, don't let the loaded title mislead you. While the author may be hell bent on bringing out the worst in his characters, the acting by a super talented young comedic cast and direction of the cracking script by multi-acclaimed Greg Karvellas ensure this second local incarnation of BAD JEWS is actually surprisingly GOOD.

In wondering whether the play might have general appeal or only be targeted at Jews, good, bad or indifferent, after much consideration I would venture the following. Yes, in many instances the flaws written into the script that define the characters as "BAD" are based on degrees of their perceived degrees of Jewish affiliation and observance with an overt Jewish historical and cultural theme, but the minefields and dynamics of squabbling over family heirlooms and one's position in the familial pecking order are universal. In this I would offer, do not be put off by *BAD JEWS*'s title and go and see for yourself whether you can identify with its themes.



Oli Booth, Glen Biderman-Pam - Image by Daniel Rutland Manners

In the opening scene the somewhat dishy Jonah is numbing out to warcraft type computer games. The role is played by local stand up comedian Oli Booth, who is the only member of the cast who does not really get to utter many of the comedic lines, but acts as restrained bastion of timing for the rest of the extremely extrovert cast, with his periodic articulations of exasperated "Alrights!"

At this point Jonah is in conversation with his cousin Daphna, played by Lara Lipschitz who has been invited for a second time to play the agent provocateur. Many of you will recognise Daphna as the type of family member who should have a "light-fuse and stand back" warning and who says what no one else will dare say while the rest can only stand and stare like headlight transfixed rabbits in the fallout of their words. Lipschitz' performance gives new meaning to the term 'acting out', she is that good she makes Daphna seem all bad, but is she?



Lara Lipschitz, Glen Biderman-Pam - Image by Daniel Rutland Manners

Enter cousin Liam, also played by a well known South African comedian Glen Biderman-Pam. Some may describe Liam's character as a bit of a self-righteous prat or something to that effect. He too can 'act out' with the best of them, but is Liam all bad and what is his real agenda?

As the only non-Jew in the story, it falls to Liam's girlfriend, Melody, played as insubstantially as necessary by 2015 UCT graduate Donna Cormack-Thomson, to whom falls the enormous task of somehow offsetting the centuries of Jewish angst demonstrated by the other characters, with the sweetest, lightest and dumbest comedic performance. Melody is really good, but is she really all good?

I read on Wikipedia that the play debuted in 2012 in NYC, earned nominations for best play, ran for five months on the West End in London and has toured the world. In one review the author offered that he thought the play might have been better titled "Jews behaving badly". Bad Jews they may be, but they are hardly the only religion or culture in the world to be either exclusively hard done by or beyond reproach.

*BAD JEWS* runs at the Fugard until 14 January. See it for the great script, great comedic deliveries and punch in the gut ending.

*Tickets, ranging from R130 to R165 can be booked through Computicket on 0861 915 8000, online at [www.computicket.com](http://www.computicket.com) or at any Shoprite Checkers outlet. Bookings can also be made at the Fugard Theatre box office on 021 461 4554. There is a generous 15% discount available for the Friends of the Fugard members.*

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