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Well

By Lisa Kron. Dir. Leigh Silverman. With Kron, Jayne Houdyshell. Public Theater (see Off Broadway).

The witty writer-actor Lisa Kron (*2.5 Minute Ride*, *101 Humiliating Stories*), does what all solo performers must eventually do: She puts her family onstage for the amusement and/or derision of a hip downtown audience. But the difference with *Well* is that Kron's "mother" (Houdyshell) actually is onstage, snoozing in a reclining chair as the audience enters. When the sly, redheaded Kron appears to introduce the show as a "theatrical exploration" of illness in an individual and in society, her mother wakes up and asks suspiciously if her daughter is making a play about her. So begins a deceptively coy but surprisingly moving show in which Kron gently dissects a painful relationship with

her mother and her own selective memory about the racial integration her mother worked to achieve in Lansing, Michigan.

The premise with which Kron at first pretends to be concerned is a parallel story of her undergoing intensive allergy testing as a kid and her mother's crusade to combat racism in the 1960s. Metatheatrical gags are as old as Pirandello, but Kron breathes new life into them by using each interruption from her mother—offering cast members drinks, critiquing her daughter's version of events—to build to an emotional showdown that avoids easy answers to some subtly posed questions: Are we just copies of our parents? What defines wellness? No doubt it takes courage to face an audience on your own, but Kron proves that it takes even more to get up there alongside your family. (See "Healing power," page 108.)—David Cote



HOUSE CALL Kron, left, attends to chronically sick mom Houdyshell.