

2.5 MINUTE RIDE

(SOLO; JOSEPH PAPP PUBLIC THEATER/SHIVA THEATER; 105 SEATS; \$25)

NEW YORK A Joseph Papp Public Theater/New York Shakespeare Festival presentation of a play in one act written and performed by Lisa Kron. Directed by Mark Brokaw. Set, Allen Moyer; costume, Jess Goldstein; lighting, Kenneth Posner; sound, Darron L. West; dramaturge, Mervin P. Antonio; production stage manager, Bess Marie Glorioso. Producer, George C. Wolfe; artistic producer, Rosemarie Tichler. Opened March 28, 1999. Reviewed March 26. Running time: 1 HOUR, 10 MIN.

By CHARLES ISHERWOOD

Lisa Kron takes some difficult trips in her latest show, a heartfelt tribute to her oddball family and in particular her father, a survivor of the Holocaust. So it's a measure of her talents that the audience has such a consistently good time. This travelogue manages to bring a smile and a laugh to some very dark corners of life without cheapening the experience. It's a model example of the autobiographical solo show at its unaffected best.

Written and performed by Kron, "2.5 Minute Ride" has been seen regionally and in London, and has benefited from the careful work of director Mark Brokaw. It arrives at the Public Theater in snappier and more shapely form than in its world premiere production at the La Jolla Playhouse in the summer of '96, though the essential journey is the same.

Kron's persona is an inherently comic combination: she's a naturally perky and cheerful Midwestern girl, hailing from Lansing, Mich., but she's also a Jewish lesbian who makes her living in the theater (she's probably best known as a member of the troupe the Five Lesbian Brothers). The unspoken paradoxes of this life provide a good deal of the evening's humor — and on some level the show's subject is just such paradoxes of life.

A trio of journeys are detailed. Odddest and funniest is the annual Kron family trip to Cedar Point amusement park in Sandusky, Ohio, the world capital of roller coasters and cholesterol, where Kron's elderly, near-blind

father insists on climbing aboard rides with names like Demon Drop and Iron Dragon, popping nitroglycerine pills for his weak heart all the while. The rest of the clan concentrates on ingesting an assortment of unhealthy foods ("I just need a little something light, maybe some pie," Aunt Francie says).

Another trip brings Kron and her girlfriend Peg home for her brother's wedding to a Brooklyn girl he met on a Jewish singles Internet site. Kron's mother is none too enthused about the orthodox nature of the nuptials: "I'm just going to go to that wedding and pretend I'm watching a National Geographic special," she cracks.

The third journey, which gives emotional ballast to the others, is a trip to Germany that Kron took with her father, during the course of which Kron casually describes his longer voyage. His parents both perished in Auschwitz, while he escaped on the Kindertransports. The trip to Auschwitz is a first for both Kron and her father, and brings the show to an emotional climax.

Kron jumps surreally from one voyage to the next, making the leaps with the aid of an imaginary slide show (we see only the bright square where the slide should be, and hear the clicking of the machine). Although by the show's end it becomes stagy, the abrupt switching between trips adds a layer of absurdity that leavens the emotionality of the Auschwitz segments. It also accents the mysterious and contradictory ups and downs, the superficial pleasures and profound sadnesses, that a whole life contains.

Kron doesn't attempt to offer new insights on the legacy of the Holocaust, as she is the first to admit ("I don't need to describe this to you," she says when the journey reaches the concentration camp, "I feel like a cliché"). And the emotion of her performance in the late going sometimes seems excessive: We become aware that she's *acting*, which adds a discomfiting layer of artificiality to a hitherto sincere and simply told story.

But mostly this "Ride" is winningly navigated and wonderfully performed. It's a funhouse tour through some of the 20th century's darkest hours that celebrates the power of laughter to help us come to grips with the sometimes horrific turns life takes.

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