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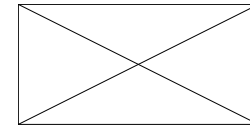
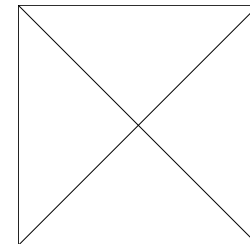
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## The Trouble With Harry

Ted Merwin

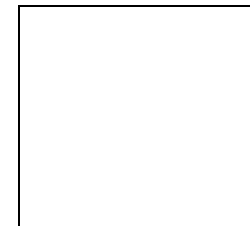
If anything reminded Nick Grosso of his Jewishness while he was growing up in St. John's Wood, a section of north London near Regents Park, it was eating at the Harry Morgan, a kosher-style eatery known for its salt beef, chopped liver, Hungarian goulash and — of course — fish and chips. In his absurdist play, "Kosher Harry," which premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in 2002, an elderly wheelchair-bound Jewish woman, an immigrant cabbie and a cynical blonde waitress all have their lives turned upside down when a sinister, enigmatic stranger seeks refuge from a storm in a run-down salt beef bar—what New Yorkers would call a deli.




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"Kosher Harry," directed by Stephanie Barton-Farcas and Aaron Kubey, opens tonight at the Spoon Theatre. It is produced by Nicu's Spoon (a theater company that casts actors with varying disabilities) in association with the New York Deaf Theatre. The production has two casts on stage at all times; one group of actors speaks the dialogue while the other performs it in sign language. Cast members are Andrew Hutcheson, Michael DiMartino, Wynne Anders, Shira Grabelsky, Alvaro Sena, Darren Fudenske, Sherrie Morgan and Jennifer Giroux.

Grosso, 38, is the son of a Jewish mother and an Italian father. He is the author of a number of acclaimed plays about young Londoners seeking love and sex, including "Peaches," "Real Classy Affair," and "Killing Paul McCartney."

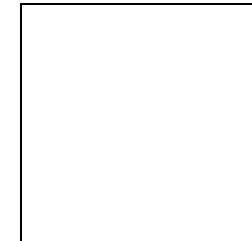
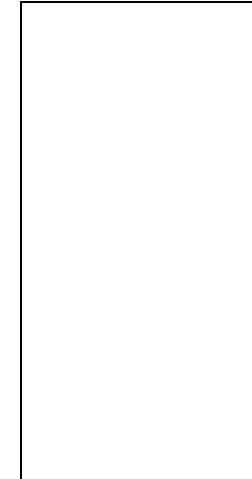
In a telephone interview from London, Grosso told The Jewish Week that while he never had a bar mitzvah, he always enjoyed going to the Harry Morgan, where one could spot "old boys sitting watching a black and white telly in the corner" even as a Jewish football agent was "tucking in" (chowing down) with his celebrity clients.

When "Real Classy Affair" opened in London in 1998, Sheridan Morley of the International Herald Tribune compared Grosso to Jez Butterworth and Patrick Marber, both major young British playwrights. But Grosso, he said, "brings something new, a flashy, urban-despairing sense of people, frantically juggling their lives and careers without any visible means of support."

The main theme of "Kosher Harry," is, according to the playwright, "damage — the characters are all damaged, and they inflict damage upon each other. But underneath each character's vitriol and hatred and animosity, there is an aching beating heart."

Barton-Farcas told The Jewish Week that the play examines the ways in which people are "severely crippled" by racism. Just as the restaurant tries to hold onto an image of itself as a classy joint, she said, the characters "put up a façade of who they are," until they ultimately have their "trappings and accessories" torn away, to disastrous effect. While the deli seems to promise a "sense of safety from the outside world," she pointed out, it becomes a place where horrifying things take place.

Why did he set the play in a deli? Grosso replied that when he starts writing a play, he first imagines the setting, and even the furniture, that



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will give the characters a fruitful environment in which to interact. Only then does he sit back to “watch how they collide, proving to each other that they exist.” But first, he advises budding playwrights, “You have to find your tables and chairs.”

“Kosher Harry” runs at the Spoon Theatre, 38 W. 38th St., through Oct. 28. Performances are Wednesday through Sunday evenings at 8 p.m. For tickets, \$18, call TheaterMania at (212) 352-3101.

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