

MOE GREEN GETS IT IN THE EYE

REVIEWED BY
SY SYNA

“**G**reed can kill you faster than a bad woman,” opines John “Big Johnny” Quaglianni (**Howard Wesson**) in the RAPP Theater Company’s production of “Moe Green Gets It in the Eye.” What he’s sounding, and what resounds throughout **Anthony DiMurro**’s play, is nothing less than its theme: greed, and the ramifications thereof.

The theme comes couched in a strange form. Here we have Big Johnny, a philosopher and a deeply religious man. Nothing odd about that, except that he’s a Mafioso, in charge of running a numbers game and various other enterprises, and, because of the nature of his occupation, not above killing an occasional man or two. It is the resolving of the contradictions inherent in deep spirituality and pragmatic criminality that provides the inner tension of both the play and the character.

It becomes instantly clear from director **R. Jeffrey Cohen**’s staging—well-aided by the setting devised by **Alexis Siroc** with **Mitchell Confer**—that we are not really in the presence of a staged version of “The Godfather.” Still, allusions—especially to Moe Green, who literally gets shot in the eye in that film—are scattered all through the play.

The tipoff that this is not realistic is the strange triptych which makes up the main scenic element. The left-hand panel is a painting of a large pair of pliers, the center section is a portrait of Moe Green shot through the eye, and the right-hand panel seems to be the reproduction of a photo of two small boys.

As the play unfolds, each of these three elements plays a pivotal role. Big Johnny is bringing up two young brothers in the business: Mario, played

by author DiMurro, and Joseph (**Darian Sartain**). After some concealed delving, Big John learns that one of the brothers is betraying him, so he has them both killed. Why?

He discloses the reason to Salvatore (**John Bakos**), a Mafia enforcer, whose particular method is to use a pair of pliers to pull out a recalcitrant’s tooth; as the victim bleeds, he gets the message that the next time it will be his life. Seems Big John killed the brothers’ father and made a huge mistake. When going through the dead man’s pockets he found a photo of his sons. Feeling responsible, he raised the boys, but then kills them both, even the one he likes, because he cannot bear the thought of always being reminded of their father.

Big John also cannot bear his own guilt. That’s why he tells it all to Salvatore. Salvatore needs no further prompting after Big John hands him a gun and kneels in prayer: Salvatore lets him have it.

It remains only to mention the outstanding performance of **Vinnie Edghill** as a retarded numbers runner, and the picture is complete.

The play is slow unwinding, but its peculiarities lift it above a mere Mafia drama. Given RAPP Theater’s artistic aesthetic, I’m sure it’s director Cohen’s intent to make Big John and his internal contradictions a paradigm for America—a nation in which greed and spirituality co-exist, often with violent consequences.

“*Moe Green Gets It in the Eye*,” presented by and at the RAPP Theater Company, 220 E. 4th St., May 5-26.