

# Theater review: 'Splitting Infinity'

Robert Hurwitt, Chronicle Theater Critic

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**Splitting Infinity:** Drama. By Jamie Pachino. Directed by Kirsten Brandt. With Amy Resnick, Robert Yacko, Chad Deverman, Christine Sage Behrens, Kevin Dedes and Cindy Goldfield. (*Through Nov. 9. San Jose Repertory Theatre, 101 Paseo de San Antonio, San Jose. Two hours, 10 minutes. Tickets: \$19.50-\$61. Call (408) 367-7255 or go to [www.sjrep.com](http://www.sjrep.com)*).



Trying to prove or disprove the existence of God through physics works about as well as trying to revive a dead hamster through prayer. Writing a play about the former effort may be just as ill-advised, or so it seems based on the evidence of Jamie Pachino's "**Splitting Infinity**" at San Jose Repertory Theatre.

The second offering in San Jose Rep's transition season - between departing Artistic Director Timothy Near and her replacement, Rick Lombardo - the West Coast premiere of "**Infinity**" opened Friday in a handsome staging by Associate Artistic Director Kirsten Brandt. As brightly packaged and engagingly performed as it is, though, the play is only sporadically entertaining.

The devil is in the details. At its core, "**Infinity**" is an unresolved love story between intellectuals who've been best friends since childhood: Nobel Prize-winning astrophysicist Leigh Sangold (Amy Resnick) and Rabbi Saul Lieberman (Robert Yacko). It's Leigh's 49th birthday (or, as she puts it, "7 squared") and Saul has left his wife to try to win Leigh once again. She, however, is hot to embark on a project to prove that there is no Judeo-Christian God with her new grad student lover Robbie (Chad Deverman).

Flashbacks - mostly in the upper level of Robin Sanford Roberts' star-spangled observatory-shaped set - display the roots of Leigh and Saul's long impasse in a night of science-versus-religion arguments, sex and tragedy 27 years earlier. Ah, but the details. The arguments are pretty shallow. The basis for their closeness is posited rather than dramatized. The charming actors who play the younger Leigh and Saul, Christine Sage Behrens and Kevin Dedes, bear little resemblance to Resnick and Yacko in appearance, speech or manner.

Then there's the matter of Leigh and Robbie's project. Pachino lays out a simplistic psychological motive for Robbie's militant atheism: He'd seen his beloved brother die because his Christian Scientist mother (a sweetly sincere Cindy Goldfield) refused medical care. Leigh's reasons are more complex and less understandable, unless she's just a closet theist who fears she's turning into spiritual black hole.

There are plenty of Nobel laureates who take on projects, sometimes crackpot ones, completely outside their fields. Given that Leigh and Robbie are physicists, though, Pachino's depiction of their quest is astonishingly banal - an Internet search, a dip into Genesis. Then again, timing has been cruel to the playwright. Leigh's conundrum about how to find out what happened in the nanoseconds after the Big Bang is already the subject of a much more interesting project in the Swiss Alps.

There are clever bits and moving moments sprinkled throughout "**Infinity**," and Resnick plays Leigh with intriguing layers of wit and pain. But Pachino has stacked the deck against the character, making her a desperately lonely woman, subsisting on booze, Chinese takeout and fear that she's long past her Nobel-winning prime.

More to the point, Pachino hasn't given us much reason to care about what happens to any of her characters. Too often, the mesmerizing orbit of a celestial panel in Roberts' set eclipses the bogus science and mundane plot.

E-mail Robert Hurwitt at [rhurwitt@sfchronicle.com](mailto:rhurwitt@sfchronicle.com).

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