

## **LOS ANGELES JOURNAL**

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'The Kid from Brooklyn: The Danny Kaye Story'

### **Summary**

More laughs, less love

Once upon a time, entertainment in America came from ... well ... entertainers. Versatile vaudevillians who sang, danced, took prat falls, made spit jokes and could spew off the names of 54 Russian composers in 38 seconds. Many went on to become movie funny men. Others became legends. Names like Chaplin, Buttons, Jolson, Hope ...

And Kaye.

Although not immediately evoking the same reverent air amongst the mainstream as, say, Bob Hope or Charlie Chaplin, Danny Kaye is, nevertheless, a legend. An inimitable Renaissance Man, Kaye was one of America's foremost entertainers of the 1940s and 1950s. Immortalised in classics like *The Court Jester*, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* and *The Kid From Brooklyn*, he is now the subject of Mark Childers' bio play *The Kid From Brooklyn: The Danny Kaye Story*, now in its West Coast run at NoHo's El Portal Theatre.

Directed and co-written by Peter J. Loewy, *Kid* stars the impressively versatile Brian Childers as Kaye. Childers is so dynamic, in fact, that in spite of a rock-solid quartet ensemble (each of whom take on several supporting roles) *Kid* is very much a one-man-show. Kaye's three minute million-miles-per-hour tongue in cheek whirlwind word songs wowed me as a youngster, and Childers does exactly what Kaye did: make it all look so damn easy.

Kaye's singularly unique repertoire, so defiant of genre, is thanks to his now all-but-extinct art form of American pantomime, an irrepressibly dynamic on stage persona, and the shrewd wit of his lyricist (and domineering wife) Sylvia Fine (Karin Leone). Writer Mark Childers weaves Kaye's life from a Catskills Borscht Belt nobody to Sam Goldwyn's wartime golden boy with snappy one-liners and a rousing string of yesterday's favorites like *Minnie the Moocher* and *Ballin' the Jack*. Brian Childers is pitch perfect in his flawless delivery of Sylvia Fine's challenging standards: from his rapid-fire delivery of Tchaikovsky to the delightfully nonsensical *Melody in 4F*, Childers nails it.

On screen, Kaye was wildly unpredictable — the rubber-faced predecessor of the likes of Jerry Lewis and Jim Carey, while off screen he could be a difficult, even petulant man with a well documented proclivity for extramarital liaisons. *Kid* spends most of its time examining his difficult (even loveless) marriage with Fine, throwing in a longstanding affair with actress Eve Arden (Christina Purcell) and a suggestive friendship with "Larry" Olivier (Joshua Finkel—a real firecracker in each of his many, many roles).

From his decades of involvement with UNICEF to his primetime variety show to moonlighting as a restaurateur, Kaye's most difficult roles were the ones that no amount of acting could get him out of: that of father and husband.

*The Kid From Brooklyn* is contagiously good fun and positively sparkles when Brian Childers loosens his wrists (and hips) and does what he does best—Kaye at his best.