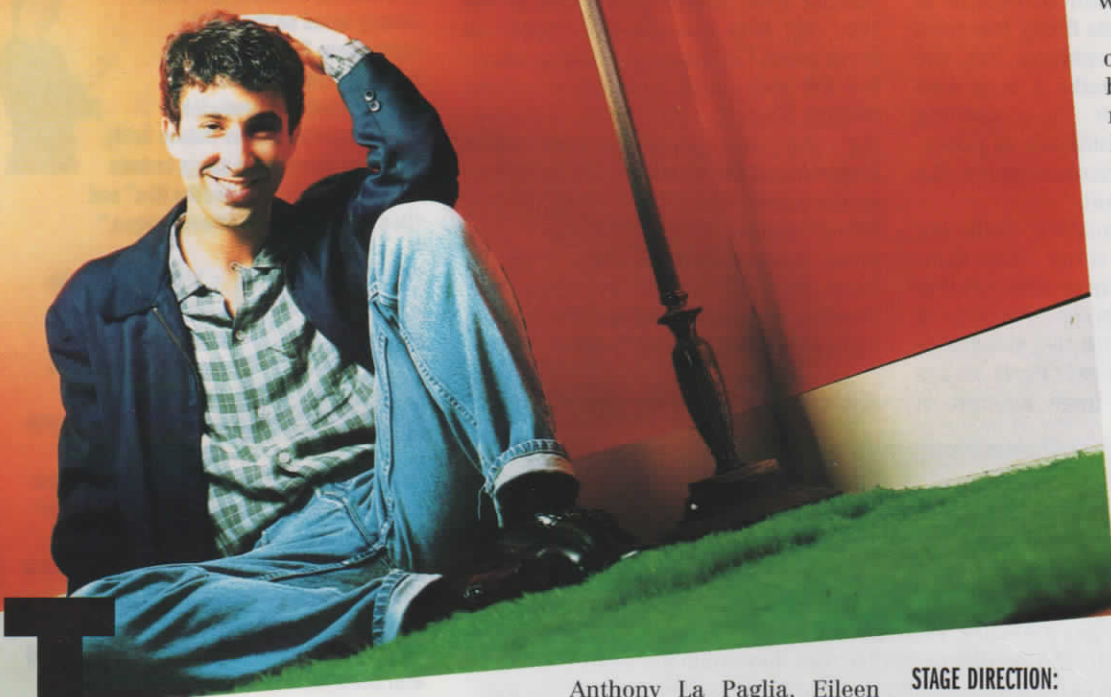


A stage production of this one's caliber would be a feather in anybody's cap.

Theater

All Aboard the *Northeast Local*



TOM DONAGHY is enjoying his martini and playing it cool at the Algonquin Hotel, New York's famous literary haunt. "I'm trying not to think of it in terms of a big event," he says, downplaying the forthcoming production of his first full-length play, *Northeast Local*, at Lincoln Center. But then the 31-year-old playwright smiles: "It is sort of like a dream come true."

Indeed a production of this caliber would be a feather in anybody's cap. In addition to the prestige of Lincoln Center, *Northeast Local* (which opens October 29 at the Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater) has an A-list director—Gerald Gutierrez, who won a Tony Award for last season's hit revival of *The Heiress*—and a top-notch cast comprising Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio,

Anthony La Paglia, Eileen Heckart, and Terry Alexander.

Donaghy's play spans 30 years, from the '60s to the '90s, a period that roughly corresponds to the playwright's own lifetime, and takes place in the blue-collar suburbs outside Philadelphia where Donaghy was raised. One can sense the autobiographical undercurrent, but Donaghy does not put himself at the center of his play. In fact, a character who could be a stand-in for the playwright himself—the 30-year-old, gay, Irish-Italian son—never appears at all. He remains an offstage presence throughout, while Donaghy focuses instead on the young man's parents. "I think I am trying to understand who I am through my history," says the playwright.

"I was very shy and introspective when I was growing up; I used to watch and listen," Donaghy continues. "So this play is in some ways a proge-

ny of all that I witnessed." In *Northeast Local* you won't find the usual coming-out traumas or dramatic parental confrontations one associates with semiautobiographical work. "I am attracted by the small things which reverberate in a larger way," he explains.

With eight years of writing plays behind him, Donaghy, who is now based in New York, is gradually building up a movie career as well. He wrote a screenplay for Tom Cruise and Paula Wagner's production company in Hollywood, and with the money from that project he wrote and directed his first film, *The Dad-shuttle*, a short that was recently screened at the New York, Los

Angeles, and San Francisco gay film festivals. In the film, which is

STAGE DIRECTION:
Donaghy moves.

based on one of Donaghy's one-act plays, a gay son and his father communicate more through what they don't talk about than what they say during a car ride. Donaghy says he has also completed a feature-length original screenplay, the story of an out 16-year-old trying to find himself, which he hopes to direct as well.

Gay characters pop up frequently in his work—there is one in the screenplay for Cruise's company also—but Donaghy says he is equally interested in characters who are not gay. "I want to understand my father's point of view as much as I understand my own," he says. "What's so exotic about being gay?"—GERARD RAYMOND

Gerard Raymond's work has appeared in The Village Voice and Theater Week.