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## ➔ East 10th Street (Axis Company)

**BOTTOM LINE:** Theater at its purest.

I'm not a theater snob. I don't have moral objections to pyrotechnics. If there's an arousing, feel-good musical number at the end of a show, chances are I'll be on my feet and more than a little farchlemp. That said, when the big show on the Great White Way is *The Little Mermaid on Wheels*, any semblance of simplicity is a welcome refresher. And I'm not sure that theater gets simpler than Axis Theater Company's *East 10th Street: Self Portrait with Empty House*. It's fifteen bucks to see a guy in black tell a story on a bare stage.

Mind you, Edgar Oliver is no ordinary guy. He takes the stage and starts talking, and you can see why the man is a downtown legend. He looks like he just stepped out of a Roald Dahl sketch, with eyes that manage to alternate between infinite fatigue and straight-up bugginess, and speaks with a voice that I can only describe as cavernous, a sound that should come out of someone ten feet tall with exceptionally long fingers. The fact that he's bottom lit through much of the show (great design by David Zeffren) only adds to his ghostly air.

The play itself is a glimpse into a reality so heightened - what with the homicidal midget cabalist, an ex-Nazi, and not to mention a live-in superintendent - that it frequently crosses into surreality. It is, however, the true story of Oliver's actual home, the house on 10th Street. The episodes are by turns darkly hilarious, heartbreaking, or just downright creepy, but they always have an undercurrent of solitude, an aloneness which the play rightly and unsentimentally acknowledges in its final moments.

It is a brave and unusual thing to see, this man telling a story without the shield of costume or character. Admittedly, it took me a minute to adjust. But, thinking about it now, I realize that that is a profound effect for a show to have - to force an audience to change the way it hears, the way it listens to a story, through the sheer simplicity of its telling. The show's an hour long, and you'll come out having witnessed something singular. Simply put, I'd say that's worth giving a shot.

(East 10th Street plays at Axis Company, 1 Sheridan Square just off 7th Avenue. Show times are Thursday through Sunday at 8pm through November 22nd. Tickets are \$15 for adults, and \$10 for students and seniors. To purchase tickets visit [axiscompany.org](http://axiscompany.org) or call 212.352.3101. Visit [axiscompany.org](http://axiscompany.org) for more info.)

Posted by Rachael Hip-Flores at [11/17/2008](#)

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