

# LAWEEKLY

## Theater

### *Completeness*, a Romantic Comedy About Grad School

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Photo by Ed Krieger

Steven Klein and Emily Swallow in *Completeness*

Alfred Hitchcock famously used the word "MacGuffin" to describe any object that's central to a plot (i.e., top-secret microfilm in an espionage thriller) but that the audience doesn't otherwise care about.

Itamar Moses takes the MacGuffin to its exasperating extreme in *Completeness*, his wonky, 2011 romantic comedy, which premiered at South Coast Rep. It gets an impeccable production by director Matt Pfeiffer on Darcy Scanlon's keen, white-paneled circuitboard set.

Geeky Elliot (a spot-on Steven Klein) is a relationship-challenged computer science grad student for whom familiarity is the death of desire. Molly (Emily Swallow) is an aspiring microbiologist whose sexual interest is piqued only as long as her career is furthered. The two meet, quickly dispose of their current lovers (Nicole Erb, Rob Nagle) and spend the remainder of the play in elliptical pillow talk about their emotional baggage, scientific ambitions and something (the MacGuffin) called NP-completeness, a kind of sound barrier of intractable complexity in computational theory (and, the playwright implies, in love).

Moses eventually makes his underwhelming point about the exponential uncertainties facing any relationship, but not before the belabored abstruseness of his algorithmic metaphor all but sidelines the delightfully engaging performances of a superlative cast.

*VS. Theatre Company*, 5453 W. Pico Blvd., Mid-Wilshire; through Dec. 7. (323) 739-4411, [vstheatre.org](http://vstheatre.org).