

## Completeness (VS. Theatre)



A small theatre, seating 30, with a brilliant use of sets (all fold-down, bright-white finishings), is presenting a terrific production of a smart play, a West Coast premiere, written by Itamar Moses, an extraordinary playwright responsible for *Bach at Leipzig* (2009 at the Odyssey Theatre), among other intelligent plays.

His latest, an intellectual examination of relationships, is set in a couple of universities, with post-grad students trying to make the concept of love- between-humans work, when microbes or computer numbers are really where their hearts, heads and possibly genitals are at.

It's a witty show, with damaged people showing how sex screws-up relationships, and how the seeds of destruction inhabit every new coupling. Moses and director Matt Pfeiffer and his cast of four take the intellectual chatter on both the personal and scientific and run with it, but at the peril of ultimately not making us care very much about them or their problems.

Mind you, there is no blame to attach to the actors or the director, but Moses, who would seem to be fearsomely bright, hasn't really made the connections between algorithms and protein-spikes on the one hand, and how to make love grow without a petri-dish or super-computer. Still, it's a fun ride with these four, especially the two leads, Elliot (Steven Klein) and Molly (Emily Swallow). Elliot is breaking up with the neurotic Lauren (Nicole Erb) and Molly is saying goodbye to a series of grad-school guys and professors, all played by Antaeus veteran, Rob Nagle.

But can their project help them with their private lives? Moses would seem to say "no," but the actors do make the journey to "no" really exciting.

And Erb and Nagle do what they can to differentiate between their trio of characters.

But, for me, the star of the show was scenic designer Darcy Scanlon's bright-white set, using concepts developed in New York or Tokyo tiny-apartment living as a blue-print design: beds that fold out; computer tables which drop from hidden recesses; and a backwall of what looks to be glass etched with forced-perspective lines. Tom Ontiveros' lighting and projection designs also add to the reality/fantasy aspects of this play.

Klein and Swallow work hard at building this doomed relationship. Swallow is a newcomer to me and she is startlingly-good, with a trained theatre voice and dynamic energy. Klein is also excellent, with his nerdy/sexy demeanor, and both are superb at rattling off the scientific and medical data given to them. It's whiz-bang from both. Erb and Nagle play their three characters each well. Although, from the script, it isn't always clear when they're onto the new characters, since they're all cut from the same academic cloth as each other.

It's a fun production of a mad play, considerably above what we normally see in small theatre. It wouldn't hurt to catch it.

*Completeness* plays through December 7th, 2014, at the tiny VS. Theatre, 5453 Pico Blvd, Los Angeles, CA. Tickets: 323.739.4411 or at [www.vstheatre.com](http://www.vstheatre.com) or [www.brownpapertickets.com](http://www.brownpapertickets.com).