



STAGE RAW

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REVIEWS



Photo by Ed Krieger

Completeness

Reviewed by Deborah Klugman

VS. Theatre

Through Dec. 7

RECOMMENDED:

Itamar Moses's *Completeness* is chockfull of discourse about protein processes and algorithmic probabilities, and if, like myself, you're not of a scientific bent, you could drift off amidst the disquisition and the theory. Chances are you won't, however. As directed by Matt Pfeiffer, VS. Theatre's current

production is so smart and the ensemble so crisp and so charming that despite the yaddiyadda, one stays engaged.

The story concerns the romantic entanglements among a quartet of university researchers and graduate students. Elliott (Steven Klein), a guy in computer science, is already considering ending his relationship with co-worker Lauren (Nicole Erb) when he meets Molly (Emily Swallow), a student in molecular biology who is studying the interaction of proteins. Mightily attracted, he offers to help her with her project by devising algorithms to help sort through her data. Soon Elliott and Molly are intimately sorting through each other's persons as well, to Lauren's dismay and the chagrin of Molly's research project advisor, who is also her self-deluded and controlling lover, Don (Rob Nagle).

Between the newly enamored duo's tumbles-in-the-hay come not only discourses on their respective disciplines but long conversations filled with intense self-analysis, including reasons why their relationship could not possibly thrive. Their jilted lovers are also case studies in neurotic behavior. Watching and listening to this loquacious foursome recalls the angst-ridden narratives of Jules Feiffer and (and, marginally, Patrick Marber's *Closer*, about another self-involved quartet of lovers).

Although the dialogue can be insightful and clever, the sheer amount of time and energy Elliott and Molly spend probing and reflecting on their own behavior grows a little tiresome – as in real life, it may be fascinating to the people involved, but not so much for a detached listener. These characters are not grand and complex or dark and psychopathic but more like basic staples of romantic comedy.

But Klein and Swallow are so endearing that they keep the play pleasurable to watch. Erb also displays terrific timing and comedic flair, and Nagle nails Don's edgy, guileful essence.

The super whiteness of Darcy Scanlin's set (its backdrop etched to look like a floor to add dimension), and Tom Ontiveros' inset lighting work in tandem to spawn an odd, sterile ambiance in which these characters struggle to relate.

One questionable element is a scene in Act 2 where the lights go off and two of the performers step out of their roles to apologize for the technical glitch. It seems a forced and unnatural interlude in this otherwise smart and engaging production.

VS. Theatre, 5453 W. Pico Blvd., L.A.; Thurs.–Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 p.m., through Dec. 7. (323) 739-4411, www.brownpapertickets.com

