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Theater Review: FOREVER BOUND (Atwater Village Theatre in Los Angeles)

by [Samuel Garza Bernstein](#) on May 12, 2018

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WHEN METAPHORS BECOME MONSTERS

Art thrives when it dances on the edge of a razor — flaunting itself and teasing us — fully embracing the risk of toppling over at any moment and smashing itself to smithereens. In *Forever Bound*, a world premiere at the Atwater Village Theatre, playwright Steve Apostolina, director Anne Hearn Tobolowsky, and an astonishingly talented cast fearlessly take residence on that razor's edge, and best of all, they make it seem effortless. It is a thrilling experience.



French Stewart plays Edmund, a rare book dealer about to go under. He is being evicted from his roach infested apartment, hounded by bill collectors, and is paralyzed by depression and agoraphobia. His affable, deceptively conniving friend Shep (Apostolina), also a book dealer, hatches a criminal plan to save Edmund from ruin. In a more conventional plot, that endeavor would go horribly wrong, to either comedic or tragic effect. The surprise here is that it does neither. A shocking twist upends all our expectations of what is to come, as two seemingly fringe characters in a parallel narrative emerge as the crux of the whole enterprise.

And that is all I will say about the story. No spoilers.



Apostolina is a thoughtful writer with a lot on his mind. Drawing inspiration from Shaw, Mamet, and *Revelations*, he meticulously creates language for four characters, each with his or her own vocabulary, speech pattern, and verbal tics. Tobolowsky balances physical fluidity and momentum with a willingness to allow for moments of stillness and wonder. Neither seems interested in calling attention to the mechanics of their achievements here, which are considerable. The narrative puts the characters in jeopardy, taking twists and turns that bring existential threats — literally and figuratively. The emotional urgency forces us to look inward, at our own beliefs about justice, love, truth, and cruelty.



As the two mystery characters, Rob Nagle and Emily Goss are catapulted from a private world that seems to exist in metaphor to the grotesque, “ripped-from-the-headlines” universe we know as modern life. Goss has the most challenging task. She plays a sheltered innocent trapped in a terrible lie, who encounters everyday wonders with tightly bound reverence and delight. Her performance is a kind of miracle. She never takes a false step, holding us breathless and terrified. She is ably assisted by lighting designer Bosco Flanagan, who bathes her in an ethereal, otherworldly glow.



Nagle is terrific in his scenes with Goss. He brings humor and humanity to a role that could be played as a cartoon in the wrong hands. As Edmund’s friend Shep, Apostolina is breezy and funny, exuding such a “regular guy” charm that you forget he is also the author of this cunning tale.



As with Goss, French Stewart plays a character who exists somewhat out of time. Stewart is a generous actor, becoming a mindful, intricate part of the ensemble. He is also a star at the top of his game, relying not on the charming eccentricities that made him famous, but on a deeply felt, naked simplicity. He could play Edmund as a hero, but that would be a lie, and Stewart doesn't seem to be driven by that kind of vanity.



On the way home after the show, my husband and I argued about the actions of the characters in *Forever Bound*. I was passionate about Edmund making a slightly different choice at the end of the play. Though he takes a brave turn, I wanted him to be even *more* courageous. As I kept yammering on, I realized that despite my high-minded admiration for Stewart's non-heroic realism, what I truly wanted was for Edmund to become a superhero. Ridiculous. I was not thinking about it from the vantage point of a writer, but as someone invested in Edmund as a living, breathing person. I loved him a little. Okay, more than a little. I wanted a brightly lit future for this man who risked everything, but still might never be a winner, never get the girl, and never live happily — ever after or otherwise. That Steve Apostolina is wise enough to deny us a fairy tale ending says everything.

photos by Kathy Flynn

Forever Bound
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