

STAGE RAW

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Emily Goss and French Stewart in *Forever Bound* at Atwater Village Theatre. (Photo by Kathy Flynn)

Forever Bound

Reviewed by Terry Morgan

Atwater Village Theatre

Through June 16

RECOMMENDED

Steve Apostolina's *Forever Bound* is an uncommon play that begins in one genre and ends in another. It's always difficult to market something that doesn't fit neatly into one category, so writers are often encouraged not to create anything like that. However, the results of such experiments are usually intriguing artistically. Such is the case with *Forever Bound*, which succeeds as both comedy and drama and is quite entertaining, even if the two genres don't meld together seamlessly.

Edmund (French Stewart) is a rare book dealer whose business has dried up. He's struggling to pay the rent on his apartment and is selling the last of his beloved books and comics to make ends meet.

His friend, freelance book scout Shep (Steve Apostolina), suggests that they break into a stranger's house and steal an expensive copy of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Meanwhile, somewhere else, a cultured young woman calling herself Rosalind (Emily Goss) is being tutored in literature by the somewhat forbidding and rigid Thomas (Rob Nagle). Eventually these plotlines combine in a way none of the characters expect.

Stewart's comic timing is expert, and he wrings every laugh possible from the exasperated Edmund. He also excels in the dramatic scenes; when his character is confronted with an experience he's completely unprepared for, it's depicted believably, with emotional delicacy and fortitude. Apostolina very funny as Shep, whose "colorful" past provides a lot of the show's humor. Goss does great work as the guileless Rosalind, anchoring the play with her strong performance. Finally, Nagle is powerful and memorable as Thomas, and steals the limelight with the intensity and skill of his acting.

Director Ann Hearn Tobolowsky manages to make both aspects of the play effective, from the light comedic scenes to the darker dramatic ones. Pete Hickok's interior, an apartment complete with framed comic book covers and cockroaches taped to the wall, nails the desperate ambience. Joanie Coyote's costumes are similarly choice, from Rosalind's flowery dress to Edmund's Batman bathrobe. Apostolina's writing is smart and witty, with a literary flair. His characters are credible and compelling, even the more outrageous ones. My only quibble is that the two genres seem like separate plays that have been stitched together in a somewhat inorganic way.

Regardless, this production is entertaining and satisfying, and fans of dark dramedies are encouraged to buy a ticket.

Atwater Village Theatre, 3269 Casitas Ave., Los Angeles; Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 p.m.; Mon., 8 p.m.; through June 16. www.plays411.com/foreverbound. Running time: approximately 1 hour and 25 minutes with no intermission.