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reviewed by Travis Michael Holder

FOREVER BOUND



Photo by Kathy Flynn

Atwater Village Theatre

Poor Edmund. This nebbishy agoraphobic book scout is really on the ropes. Flat broke despite having sold his beloved classic comic book collection, he's still forced to live on ramen noodles while fearing the next phone call will be one of those incessant bill collectors instead of a potential customer.

After trying to convince his skeptical landlord there are cockroaches scampering all over his tiny LA apartment, at the suggestion of his best friend Shep he has begun to capture the critters in mid-crawl by scotch-taping them to the wall to struggle and twitch and die the same slow death as he himself seems to be experiencing. This odd behavior is hard for Edmund to discuss, quipping to Shep that he probably should stop mixing cocaine and meth but then again, it does give him less teeth to brush. But whatever the origins of his roach-taping obsession might be, it really doesn't matter much anyway now since the guy has just delivered Edmund's final eviction notice.

When Shep hatches an unexpected plan to steal a rare first edition of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* from the home of a dour and unfriendly collector he met in a bookstore and followed home, Edmund is conflicted. Interested, yes, but conflicted. In the world premiere of Steve Apostolina's *Forever Bound* at the Atwater Village Theatre, no bumbling amateur thieves have been as endearingly watchable since Donny and Teach first enlisted Bobby as their accomplice.

And what could have possibly been a better one-of-a-kind choice than to cast French Stewart as Edmund, an actor who has

devoted his entire career to playing quirky, modern-day Walter Mitty-esque losers? Although Stewart has certainly veered over the years from his days as the otherworldly (literally) Harry Solomon, native of the barred-spiral galaxy on the Cepheus-Draco border—you know, the “One with the Transmitter in his Head”—it’s a pleasure to see an echo of his signature bizarre behavior we all grew to love.

Not only does Stewart possess the most fluid timing of any comedian working today, under the precision guidance of director Ann Hearn Tobolowsky, his lovably dysfunctional Edmund is fully able to suddenly tumble into emotionally-poignant dramatic moments without a hint of a seam.

Playwright Apostolina is also well-cast as Shep, a role he probably wrote for himself, ironically running with the least fully-realized role in his own play while giving way for Tobolowsky’s other three actors to shine. Still, he manages to mine a wonderful dark humor in the depths of his Shep as more and more details of the rough-hewn guy’s questionable former life are exposed—to Edmund’s shock and awe.

As the play’s other two at first unrelated characters, Emily Goss as the troubled Rosalind and Rob Nagle as her mentor Thomas, another pair of gifted veteran El Lay theatre performers hold their own as well. Goss is incredibly moving as a girl who deserves more than life has had to offer her and, through the course of the play, gradually discovers a brave new world around her. Goss is exceptionally believable as the revelations begin to unfold.

As Thomas, well... without giving too much away, let me just say that Nagle even surpasses his several previous turns playing some of the creepiest Hannibal Lector-clone villains to ever step before an audience. In one scene and with his character at a considerable physical disadvantage, Nagle’s subtle eye-rolls and quietly amused facial expressions as the Laurel and Hardy of criminals try to solidify their plans, are perfection.

Apostolina’s sharp humor is amazingly topical in a clever subterranean way. As our country goes to shit at the hands of a mentally-challenged madman and we are all collectively questioning and redefining our morality on a daily basis, though the laughs are frequent in *Forever Bound*, we are ultimately left with a reason to contemplate what is moral and what actions are truly acceptable in the world today.

In this messed-up era when kids are killing other kids at school on a regular basis and the rights of others to live however and wherever they desire is in question, *Forever Bound* offers unsettling food for thought and, probably, can generate a few sleepless nights as well. Quite an accomplishment for such a razor-edged comedy.

THROUGH JUNE 16: Atwater Village Theatre, 3269 Casitas Av., LA. 323.960.4429 or www.plays411.com/foreverbound