



Culture Monster

ALL THE ARTS, ALL THE TIME

The Spotlight: Rob Nagle in 'Play Dates' at Theatre Asylum

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Whether he's a G-man questioning Betty Draper in "Mad Men" or a bewigged composer in "Bach in Leipzig," actor Rob Nagle brings a classical precision to his work. Now this L.A. stage favorite displays his sharp timing in "Play Dates," Sam Wolfson's cheeky rom-com about the slings and arrows of love, from the kindergarten playground to marital errand runs at Target.

I hear you dance a mean minuet. Discuss.

When I was 12, my family moved from Illinois to Williamsburg. Instead of looking for a paper route, I tried to join the fife and drum corps -- it's like colonial marching band. I was told the waiting list for the corps starts in utero, but there was availability in the colonial dance troupe. There were more girls than guys, so that worked out. Then I became a character interpreter at CW.

That's Colonial Williamsburg, not the "Vampire Diaries" network.

Yes. My character, James Innes, died of dropsy.

Even in contemporary plays, you give off a certain classical technique.

What interests me with the classics is making them resonate in a modern sense. Illuminating the text to the ear we have now.

You've been in L.A. 14 years. What's the biggest myth about theater here?

I was told L.A. is not a theater town and was prepared to hate it. You can argue about the waiver money. But staying home and not doing theater is just fulfilling the myth. So I say yes a lot. When you get out there, people call you for other things.



In "Play Dates," you play a guy who gets his heart broken in kindergarten and grows up to become a relationship expert. What reactions do you get talking to the audience as the Love Doctor?

Utter terror. Once the audience realizes they don't have that safe fourth wall anymore, it's like, "this is a large talk show personality and he's coming toward me." I'm asking about their first heartbreak, so I have to coax them to

... speak. One night a woman called out an unusual male name. Later, someone e-mailed us with the man's Facebook profile. It was like, this guy's still out there...

Back when you were a single guy, what would you have asked the Love Doctor?

Whether it's really true that you can fall in love with a friend. My wife and I were friends for four years before we started to date. We've been married 16 years, which I guess is like 140 in Hollywood years.

One of the play's more outrageous scenes is a married couple grooming each other in the bathroom. It really strikes a nerve in the audience.

People can't believe what they're seeing. There are groans of disgust and laughs of recognition at these strangely intimate practices. There's definitely the feeling of, I shouldn't be watching this.

But you never judge.

Nope. I'm just trying to hold the bathroom mirror up to nature.

-- Charlotte Stoudt

At [Theatre Asylum](#) through March 6. Read Kathleen Foley's review [here](#).

Photo: Rob Nagle supplies advice to the lovelorn in "Play Dates." Credit: Ed Krieger.



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