



Culture Monster

ALL THE ARTS, ALL THE TIME

Theater review: 'Play Dates' at Theatre Asylum

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In "Play Dates," post-millennials Sam and Stacey meet cute, in conventional romantic comedy manner. Except for one twist, and it's a corker.

Sam (Rob Nagle) works as a day trader... in the preschool lunchroom: "Snowballs, Star Crunches, desserts mostly." Stacey (Elizabeth Bond) is "in sales," i.e., the old Girl Scout cookie racket. Actually, she's "still just a Brownie, but fingers crossed." As these 5-year-olds apply adult behavioral syntax to kindergarten context, hilarity ensues.

And playwright Sam Wolfson, source of the phenomenally successful "Jewtopia," is just warming up. After its expository "Boy Meets Girl" segment establishes the comic précis, "Play Date" becomes a delightfully disarming take on the travails of finding and maintaining love.

We next meet grown-up Sam as relationship guru "Dr. Love," who deflates pop-culture myths and callers with ruthless zeal -- until a long-ago voice phones in. "Honeymoon Period" brings it home, as entrenched spouses Mike (Brian Monahan) and Katie (Krystal Marshall) follow Dr. Love's tips on rekindling passion. Their riotous swinging attempt generates "Play Date's" unexpectedly acute point -

- "It's the journey you experience together that keeps the honeymoon period alive."

Director Jennifer Chambers keeps things as sweetly cracked as the leafy heart that centers designer Kurt Boetcher's set, abetted by Christian Epps (lighting), Michael Mullen (costumes) and John Zalewski (sound). Her cast, doubling in supporting roles, is spot-on, Nagle and Bond's gonzo dance d'amour and Monahan and Marshall's gymnastic evening ablutions easily worth admission.

Cribbing names from "The Simpsons" for minor characters distracts; Dr. Love could stand one more Hollywood target. These are minor cavils -- "Play Dates" is the most playful date show since "Regretrosexual: A Love Story," and a satisfying populist treat.

-- David C. Nichols

"Play Dates," Theatre Asylum, 6320 Santa Monica Blvd., L.A. 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays, 7 p.m. Sundays. Ends March 6. \$25. (323) 960-7784. Running time: 1 hour, 30 minutes.

Photo: Elizabeth Bond, left, and Rob Nagle. Credit: Ed Kreiger.