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## Role Play

Playwright Itamar Moses looks behind the curtain of contemporary romance in "Love/Stories."

Just in time for Valentine's Day comes Itamar Moses' *Love/Stories (or But You Will Get Used To It)*, now at the Flea's intimate downstairs theater. Whether or not this collection of short plays about the ups and downs of contemporary romance makes a great date night might depend on your (and your date's) appetite for metaphor.

"They're plays about theatre," says Moses, the busy, frighteningly brilliant young playwright who brought us *Bach at Leipzig*, *The Four of Us* and *Back Back Back*. "They're about theatre as a way investigating the way we play our lives—the roles we play in our lives and the way we 'cast' other people in our romantic relationships."

So in one piece, a playwright holding auditions for his new opus is confronted by an unwelcome reminder of the real-life romance that inspired his play.

This piece, Moses explains, is about "how an audition situation is a way of dramatizing the problem that he didn't 'audition' well enough for that girl." The metaphor is even richer than it first appears: As any actor could tell you, Moses notes, "Auditioning is a totally different skill from collaborating, just as dating is different from a relationship."

The evening's short plays aren't just about relationships—they're also *in* relationship to each other. In a sense, in putting together the program, Moses and his director, Michelle Tattenbaum, played matchmaker.

"These are not the only short plays I have, but these are the ones that when you put them together, they have an interesting conversation with each other," Moses says. "And fun resonances start to emerge when you put them all together and cast them with same five actors."

Another playlet uses a post-show talk-back with a theatre audience as a jumping-off point for another take on love. *Love/Stories* marks an important departure for Moses, most of whose previous plays have dealt with competition among insecure men, whether musicians (*Bach at Leipzig*), writers (*The Four of Us*) or pro baseball players (*Back Back Back*).

"Women are a very potent offstage presence in all those plays," Moses says. "They've got men reporting back to each other about their confusions with women. In these plays, you actually see the women."

Even for a busy young playwright, Moses had an exceptionally jam-packed 2008: *The Four of Us* had acclaimed productions in both New York and Los Angeles; *Back Back Back* stepped up to the plate in San Diego and came home to Manhattan Theatre Club; the high school epic *Yellowjackets* opened at Berkeley Repertory Theatre and an older play of Moses', *Celebrity Row*, bowed in Chicago.

"The fall was really crazy because everything overlapped, one thing after another," Moses says, sounding a bit relieved to be past the crunch. "My expectation is that I will have no productions in New York next season. I feel like last season happened because I spent a couple of years after *Bach at Leipzig* quietly working on plays."

When he does reemerge with new work, be prepared for a different Itamar Moses.

"Because a lot of the last few plays were small and intimate, I might now feel comfortable doing something bigger and more sweeping," Moses says. "I mean, having put women onstage once, I might have opened the floodgates to different kinds of love stories."

## ROLE PLAY

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One upcoming project that is certain to have a larger canvas, if not a surfeit of female roles, is a musical adaptation of Jonathan Lethem's Brooklyn-set novel *The Fortress of Solitude*, which Moses is working on with *Civilians* and *Saved* composer Michael Friedman.

"The danger is that everybody gets really excited about it before they see it and it can't possibly live up to that," Moses concedes. "We're going to go see *Billy Elliot* and try to steal some ideas of how to do a musical in a gritty environment."

Asked about the subtitle of the *Love/Stories* anthology—*But You Will Get Used To It*, which doesn't sound like the rosiest romantic prognosis—Moses says with a smile, "It's from one of the plays which is about Eastern European theatre artists. It's not pessimistic—it only sounds pessimistic. It's what passes for optimism in Eastern Europe."

Or in the arguably thornier territory of the human heart.

[Click here for more information about \*Love/Stories\* \(or \*But You Will Get Used To It\*\).](#)