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By Terry Teachout

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Mr. Moses is among the few playwrights who can write interestingly about writers and their work, a subject that is usually dramatic poison, and he's done it again in "Love/Stories (or But You Will Get Used to It)," a program of five related one-act plays that is far better than its coy title.

The two central panels of "Love/Stories," "Authorial Intent" and "Szin haz," are tales of romance gone wrong in which Mr. Moses plays Stoppard-style narrative tricks on the audience. "Authorial Intent" starts with a breakup scene, followed by a replay of the same scene in which the two characters analyze their lines instead of speaking them ("Objective: Change her mind. Tactic: Insist behavior is not a tactic designed to change her mind"). Then the lights go up and the actors, playing themselves, enact a "real-life" scene in which Character B (Michael Micalizzi) tries to pick up Character A (Laurel Holland) after the show. On paper this may sound too clever for its own good, but on stage it is amazingly effective -- and very funny.

Even better is "Szin haz," in which Istvan Zoltan Andras (Felipe Bonilla), the humorless director of a Russian theater company called "The Slow Death of the Human Soul," takes questions from the audience, speaking through a translator (Maren Langdon) whose English is a bubble or two off plumb: "This company is now of course very much knowed about by peoples, but for very much time it was not knowed, or if it was, it was unliked, and not liked, which is what people were saying in the audiences, and in the critics, and also shouting in the streets at Istvan." At first Mr. Moses plays the scene for laughs, but then he takes an unexpected swerve toward seriousness, and all at once you're holding your breath.

"Love/Stories" is being mounted at the Flea Theater, an Off-Off-Broadway house whose downstairs performing space is somewhat bigger than a shoebox. The young performers are members of the Bats, the Flea's resident repertory company, and they're all quite good, especially Ms. Langdon, who plays three sharply contrasting roles without any visible strain (she also appears in "Chemistry Read" and "Temping," two other plays on the bill). Michelle Tattenbaum, who has staged several of Mr. Moses' plays but whose work is new to me, has done a terrific job with "Love/Stories," whose postmodern prestidigitation poses some formidable directorial challenges. How, for instance, do you stage a three-character playlet in which two of the characters neither speak nor move?

The one comparatively weak link in "Love/Stories" is the last of the five plays, "Untitled Short Play," which goes on a little bit too long and so fails to put the necessary capper on the evening. Otherwise, I'd say that Mr. Moses has given us the smartest mixed bill of one-act plays to come along since David Ives's "Mere Mortals and Others." This is the fourth show of his that I've seen, all of them different in tone and subject matter and all equally impressive. Is there *anything* he can't do?