

show listings: plays

Please Please Please Love Me

THEATRE[Under St. Marks](#)**OPENED**

November 20, 2003

CLOSED

December 21, 2003

PERFORMANCES

Thu - Sat at 8pm

RUNNING TIME

1 hour, 40 minutes

TICKETS

\$15

\$10 students/seniors

SmartTix

212-868-4444

CASTRobert Brown, Chris Catalano,
Kevin T. Collins, Fred DeReau,
Jennifer Gill, Theresa Goehring,
Amy Overman, Jennifer Jill
White**AUTHOR**

Rick Vorndran

DIRECTOR

Jason Unfried

PRODUCING COMPANYDysfunctional Theater
Company**nytheatre.com review**

by Martin Denton · November 22, 2003

Please Please Love Me, the new play by Rick Vorndran, is enormously entertaining. Structured as a series of loose but connected episodes, this comic drama charts the up-and-down love lives of four young adults over the course of an eventful year. Eschewing boundaries or conventions, *PPPLM*'s scenes range grandly in style, tone, and format: they're almost all interesting and compelling and a few of them are downright brilliant in their inventiveness and/or incisiveness. Dysfunctional Theatre Company should be proud of this eclectic, quintessentially off-off-Broadway offering.

The play begins in a bowling alley (conjured uncannily by director Jason Unfried with a couple of chairs and multi-purpose cubes plus some evocative choreography: his and our imaginations get a pleasing workout here) where Steve and Nina have reluctantly agreed to meet their neighbors Larry and Linda for an evening of beer, chips, and exercise. Steve and Nina have been together for three years and they're reasonably content. But they're greatly impressed by Larry and Linda's zest for each other and for life, especially when they learn that Larry and Linda have "split up": they still live together, but they no longer think of themselves as a couple, having decided to "open up" their decidedly quirky relationship.

So Steve and Nina decide that they should break up too. And thus begin twin odysseys—interwoven, occasionally, with updates from the Larry/Linda front—chronicling their first year apart. Ultimately Steve emerges as the protagonist of *PPPLM*, but for most of the play's running time Vorndran plays with our sympathies and expectations, juggling absurd and/or fanciful scenarios with a more linear throughline about Steve's quest for love and security. Not everything that the playwright tries here works, but there's absolutely no danger of boredom as we watch these four characters negotiate a weird, wacky, and sometimes hazardous year.

A few sequences stand out. In one, Steve and Nina meet for the first time after many months apart at a Costume Party From Hell—Vorndran, Unfried and their cast capture the strained ambience of this gathering with uncanny, hilarious precision. Immediately after comes a masterful scene in which Steve and Linda's unsuccessful romance-on-the-rebound is charted from beginning to end, consisting only of seven repetitions of a brief conversation about a pair of scissors. The deliberate *avant-garde*-ness of this set piece actually works in its favor, jolting us into paying attention as we catch on to what Vorndran is doing: it emerges as *PPPLM*'s spectacularly arresting center.

Other concepts—like a high-powered seminar about flirtation, or a surreal party for National Public Radio employees, or the morphing of one of Larry's dates into a fantastical reality game show involving Joan of Arc, Casanova, and Queen Elizabeth I of England—are wildly imaginative but less consistently satisfying. In general, the farther we stray from Steve's story, the less absorbed we tend to be: a clearer focus on his leading character would probably sharpen Vorndran's sometimes scattershot script.

But *PPPLM* is funny and diverting throughout, and winds up making some vivid and surprising points about relationships, loneliness, and growing up. It also provides some terrific opportunities for the eight actors who comprise its cast. Fred DeReau anchors the show as Steve; in multiple roles, Robert Brown, Chris Catalano, Kevin T. Collins, Jennifer Gill, Theresa Goehring, Amy Overman, and Jennifer Jill White all do outstanding work.