



SCANDAL IN MANHATTAN

The Actor's Project NYC at the WorkShop Theater as part of the Midtown International Theatre Festival

Playwright and director Bobby Holder's comedy *Scandal in Manhattan*, part of the Midtown International Theatre Festival, tells the tale of two Southern sisters (Brittany Bell Spencer and Elizabeth Phillip) caught in a rivalry for the affections of a handsome young wannabe troubadour with a secret (Evan Dahme). Following the mysterious death of their father from roach poison placed in his coffee instead of sugar, the sisters decamp to a midtown New York hotel where they encounter a cast of zanies.

Prime among the kooks they meet is the Hotel Royale's front-desk manager, the flamboyant Fred Fontaine (Joe Iozzi), and his ditzzy new assistant, April (Kelly Kemp). Added to the mix like extra ingredients to a stew are an aggressive rose seller, a pair of newlyweds, and a robber with a passionate relationship with a stuffed animal, among others.

Screwball comedy is a difficult form to master. Silliness and complications galore must be balanced against a performance style that exaggerates reality without completely breaking with it. In the case of *Scandal in Manhattan*, the cast of 12, despite a great deal of energy, falls short of creating a delightful chaos and manages only a mostly shrill, forced, and frankly exhausting 90-minute juggernaut of pratfalls, smashups, and shouting.

When broad comedy fails to catch fire, it can be hard to assess the reasons, but in this case a flaccid script and sloppy direction leave the cast adrift, forcing them to fill in unmotivated behavior and nonsensical plot with formless and uncomfortable posturing.

Presented by the Actor's Project NYC as part of the Midtown International Theatre Festival at the WorkShop Theater, 312 W. 36th St., 4th floor, NYC. July 20–30. Remaining performances: Sat., July 26, 3 p.m.; Wed., July 30, 8:30 p.m. (212) 279-4200 or www.ticketcentral.com.

Reviewed by Christopher Murray

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