

# Rocky Mountain News

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## 'Frankie' just feels natural

**By Lisa Bornstein, Rocky Mountain News**  
**March 2, 2007**

There has to be a good reason to restage a 20-year-old play. Paragon Theatre Company has two, in actors Emily Paton Davies and Thomas Borrillo, who hold the stage for two hours as the sad sacks of Frankie and Johnny in the *Clair de Lune*.

Davies and Borrillo are a true-life couple, but whether their pairing brings anything extra to the stage is only their business. What matters to the audience is that they give affecting, exciting performances in Terrence McNally's witty and moving look at the risks of love.

The sounds of Tom Waits and sexual groaning open the play, and the two contain the entire story: Waits in his songs of unseen everyfolk, and sex in the reason that Frankie and Johnny are in this room. When the lights come up and the moans stop, we find a waitress and a short-order cook, both on the cusp of middle age and a lifetime of solitude. They're wrapping up what could be a one-night stand or the beginning of a love affair, and the decision carries us through the play.

Michael Stricker directs with an effective simplicity, exploring the push and pull between two lonely people. Frankie, with bruises on the inside, shrinks not from nudity but intimacy. When Johnny, instantly enraptured, tells her, "You have the most beautiful breasts," Davies replies with a snort. To treat his compliments with any degree of sincerity would begin to expose her to the possibilities of love and pain. Sex is much easier.

Davies may be a shade too young and attractive for the role, but she has terrific acting instincts. In fact, we never see her acting. There are no tics, no showiness, just the quiet kind of truthful work that often is overlooked.

Where Davies is angular, Borrillo is soft, physically and emotionally. His Johnny is a garrulous suitor who fills the empty spaces with words and affection, overwhelming a woman whom he first kissed that evening. She thinks it's a fling; he pours his heart out, infuriating her with his persistence and surety. Borrillo makes Johnny a subway Tony Bennett, offering up grimy courtliness.

The invisibility of direction and performance combine with David Lafont's plain but neat studio apartment and Jacob M. Welch's intimate lighting to bring the audience into Frankie and Johnny's home. There we spy on two souls laid bare, and maybe catch a glimpse of our own lives.

## Frankie and Johnny in the *Clair de Lune*

• **Grade: A**

• **When and where:** 7:30 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays, through March 10 at the Phoenix Theatre, 1124 Santa Fe Drive

- **Cost:** \$15 to \$19
- **Information:** 303-777-3292

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