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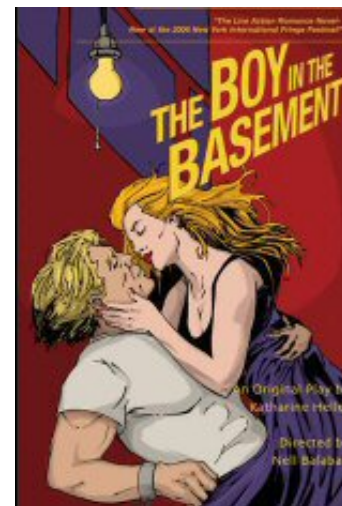
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The Boy in the Basement

By Katharine Heller
The Present Company
SoHo Theatre, New York City

Review by [Rachel Lynn Brody](#) (2008)

This production is reviewed as part of the New York Fringe Festival. More information is available at www.fringenyc.org.



Catherine DuCheval decides on his penname (picking the female name, one presumes, for reasons of sales and promotion later on down the line) within a few moments of *The Boy in the Basement's* beginning, setting the tone for the farce in which four college co-eds subjugate a would-be robber. Instead of turning him into the police (who might throw him in jail, thereby dooming his potentially made-up sister to a painful death due to lack of medication), Xandra (Katharine Heller), Anna (Meghan Powe), Clarissa (Lynne Rosenberg) and Aurora (Anna Stumpf) decide to make the handsome Lance Speedworth into their weekend sex slave, as punishment for an attempt to steal their TV. Or at least, Xandra, Clarissa and Aurora decide to use him for his body; Anna is still a virgin and, as such, her roommates decide it's best she not know what they and Lance are getting up to.

A setup potentially rife with opportunity for objection is diffused thanks to the humorous approach of Katharine Heller's writing, and particularly enhanced by the sharp-as-a-tack repartee shot out from Lynne Rosenberg, as the liberated, sex-positive Clarissa.

As each girl - Anna included, though in far more innocent interactions than her flatmate - spends time with Lance, the would-be robber has a profound effect on each of them, helping them find the physical or emotional satisfaction lacking in their current situations. As Speedworth, Tom Macy does an admirable job of adapting, chameleon-

like, to each of the other performers, but it is sometimes difficult to tell where the manipulations end and Lance's true character begins. This water is muddied further by Heller's script and the narrator, both of which stand back far enough from its characters to allow audiences to draw their own conclusions, but could probably have afforded one or two steps closer to the action.

After the initial setup, we know each off the characters in broad strokes; only in the case of Clarissa do these strokes really open up to show a more fully rounded character. In Xandra and Clarissa's case, their discovery of happiness in each other's arms, rather than Lance's, is a plot point that allows Anna and Lance to find momentary love, but ultimately we don't learn much more about these two ladies after this point.

Laying aside any huge leaps of credibilty in the script (I have never met three women so eager to use a stranger, and robber at that, for sexual fulfillment - and I hope I never do), this is in a fun fantasy, a comic-book that entirely lives up to its promise of being a live-action romance novel. This is a story that would seem completely at home nestled between copies of teen or young adult romance novels, and watching it through the eyes of the tongue-in-cheek narrator allows both audience and performers to fully enjoy the novelties and quirks of two forms - romance novel and farce.

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