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Regional

Rooms: A Rock Romance

(MetroStage, Alexandria, Va.; 140 seats; \$45 top)

By PAUL HARRIS

A MetroStage and Geva Theater Center presentation in association with Van Hill Entertainment, the Musical Machine, Jeffrey M. Raff and Small Pond Enterprises of a musical in one act with music and lyrics by Paul Scott Goodman, book by Goodman and Miriam Gordon. Directed by Scott Schwartz. Musical direction, arrangements and orchestrations, Jesse Vargas. Choreography, Matt Williams.

Monica P. Miller - Natascia Diaz
Ian Wallace - Doug Kreeger



Natascia Diaz and Doug Kreeger star in tuner 'Rooms: A Rock Romance,' written by husband and wife Paul Scott Goodman and Miriam Gordon.

Premiering at MetroStage in Alexandria, Va., Glasgow-born musician-writer Paul Scott Goodman ("Bright Lights, Big City") and wife Miriam Gordon's "Rooms: A Rock Romance" is an engaging tuner about innocence in the music world. A decade in the making including a workshop at the 2005 New York Musical Theater Festival, show offers an imaginative score and earnest performances from its two-person cast, Natascia Diaz and Doug Kreeger.

The brief but tune-filled musical follows a simple yarn of youthful exuberance that mirrors to a large degree Goodman's own '70s-era experience in the music biz. Two young Scottish musicians meet and agree to collaborate as a rock songwriting and performing act. They head to London and New York City, achieving success and cultivating a romance until hard drinking tears them apart. Diaz reprises her role from 2005 as the spunky and assertive Jewish girl growing up fast, while Kreeger plays the introverted lad with loads of talent, who has inherited his father's alcohol dependency.

The slim plot unfolds on Adam Koch's sparse set with help from a moveable door and frame, wheeled around by the duo to provide physical and emotional separation when needed, hence the title. It all unfolds rather predictably, although at an allegro pace decreed by director Scott Schwartz.

But it's Goodman's solid score that carries the show. Backed by a five-piece band that includes two guitars, the 17 numbers offer a varied mix of rock tempos and styles, embellished with smart lyrics filled with attitude and alliteration. Consistently cool orchestrations by music director Jesse Vargas bring additional professional touches.

Diaz and Kreeger, both familiar to D.C. auds as part of the Signature Theater's Kander & Ebb festival earlier this year, step up to vocal and acting assignments that demand plenty of range and stamina. Diaz has developed into an extremely versatile singer, equally at home delivering a heavy punk rock composition from Goodman as she is with a delicate score from Stephen Sondheim or John Kander. The talented Kreeger shows equal dexterity as he shifts musical gears throughout the performance.

Standout numbers include the tender "Friday Night Dress," Kreeger's song of budding infatuation, and "Bring the Future Faster," the Diaz character's impatient perspective on life. They team up for several enjoyable duets, among them the title song, "Rooms," and the punkish "All I Want Is Everything."

"Rooms" is receiving a spirited and classy sendoff at MetroStage, an intimate space that under a.d. Carolyn Griffin has become an incubator for new works, especially musicals. This tuner is co-produced with Geva Theater Center in Rochester, where it heads in September following a seven-week run here. Its inviting touches and affordable budget will presumably enhance prospects beyond that.

Set, Adam Koch; costumes, Alejo Vietti; lighting, Herrick Goldman; sound, Daniel Erdberg. Opened Aug. 3, 2008. Reviewed Aug. 7. Runs through Sept. 7. Running time: 1 HOUR, 20 MIN.

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