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A *CurtainUp* Review *Push Up 1-3*

**Push Up -- renamed and newly translated Comes to the
Connelly in the East Village**

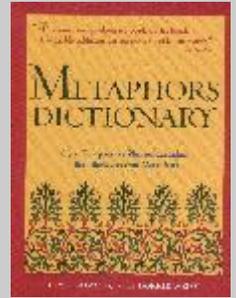
By [Elyse Sommer](#)

When Lizzie Loveridge reviewed Roland Schimmelpfennig's three connected one-acters, it was just plain *Push Up*. Now the Desert Apple Theatre Company has brought it to the beautiful Connelly Theater in the East Village with a new translation and expanded title.

Melanie Dreyer's translation and Cynthia Dillon's direction make the German playwright's work clear and accessible for American audiences. The six actors who pair up for this new production of the three playlets do well by the format which has each segment alternate between interaction (more accurately, confrontation) and then freeze-framing one character during most an interior monologue by the other. The two additional actors playing the bookend characters who establish what will and has happened make the most of their smaller roles.

Like Lizzie Loveridge, I found much in these at once funny and sad plays to make me want to see more of Schimmelpfennig's work. Her comments about the production she saw are so pertinent to the one I saw that I would be repeating myself with another detailed review.

I too thought the first piece was the standout, with Thea McCartan's Sabine and Chris Campbells Angela warranting the same praise as the London actresses. The middle piece could have been tightened by about five minutes but the performances, especially Leo Kittay's Robert, were fine. I too liked the third "push-up" the least though not really for the lack of sympathetic qualities. All these people are emotional cripples and more laughable (the play does in fact evoke numerous laughs) and pathetic than sympathetic. By the time that last roundelay of parallel inner turmoil and ambition to become the never seen Kramer's favorite gets going, it seems somewhat



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too schematic and no longer grabs and amuses quite as much as its predecessors.

Nicholas R. Kestlake's spare staging nicely evokes the nameless, faceless corporate office that could be in just about any European city. The two see-through panels through which we see the shadows of the next set of players ease the transition from one scene to the next. A tall slanted panel creates an apt sense of the tottering egos behind the characters cool facades.

Push Up 1-3 is another of those theater bargains (tickets are \$15) that more New Yorkers should be aware of before complaining that live theater is too expensive.

The current production notes:

Push Up 1-3

Written by Roland Schimmelpfennig, translated by an American, Melanie Dreyer
Directed by Cynthia Dillon

Cast: Ken Bolden, Cate Brewer, Chris Campbell, Steven Hess, Leo Kittay, Thea McCartan and Tashya Valdevit

Set Design: Nicholas Kestlake

Lighting Design: Todd Field

Desert Apple Theatre Company at Connelly Theater, 220 East 4th St (Ave A/Ave B)

9/16/04 to 10/03/04; opening 9/20/04

Running Time: 1 hr 20 mins, without intermission.

General seating.

Tickets: \$15

-- Review of the London production by
Lizzie Loveridge

The way I see things, there can only be two reasons why you don't trust me: one - my age, and two - my sex.

--- Sabine

Push Up is German playwright Roland Schimmelpfennig's first play to be produced in Britain but another, *Arabian Night*, which was nominated play of the year by six German critics, comes to the Soho Theatre at the end of April. This play, which is three linked playlets, each with a pair of actors, kicks off the Royal Court's International Playwrights Season. All the characters work for the same organisation and each pair is in competition with each other on the employment ladder, pushing upwards for success. A prologue and an epilogue sees two security people, Heinrich, (Peter Sproule) setting the scene, and Maria (Flaminia Cinque) bringing things to a close.

Angelika (Sian Thomas, we have been told by Heinrich, owns the corporation and lives with the mysterious Kramer, who runs it. Angelika is interviewing Sabine, (Lucy Whybrow) a woman probably twenty years her junior, who is both attractive and successful. Although the interview is professional it quickly becomes obvious that the rivalry is personal.

In the second pairing, bright young things Robert (David Tennant) and Patrizia

(Jaqueline Defferary) discuss a new advertisement for the company. Underneath the professional conversation lies a terrific sexual pull that neither of them has followed up on, and each feels rejected by the other.

The final scene is between two men, an ageing widower and fitness freak, Hans (Robin Soans) and Frank (Nigel Lindsay), younger but addicted to surfing the net in his free time. Hans and Frank are both hoping for the prestigious Delhi job that was to have been Sabine's.

What is interesting about Schimmelpfennig's writing is the sharp and crackly dialogue, but there are also long passages where the characters turn to the audience and describe their life and their inner thoughts. In these individual moments, we see just how the pairs mirror and echo the other. The two women have identical routines but find it difficult to establish common ground. The male/female couple muddy their sexual response to each other with workplace competition but again, their individual monologues show that they both want to but don't know how to connect. The final and least interesting couple are the two totally different men with the competition for the same job their only point of contact. Schimmelpfennig cleverly lets us know the outcomes of each encounter, using Thomas and Maria to tell us what the characters have not.

There are two bitingly, tight performances from Lucy Whybrow and Sian Thomas in the best of the three pairings. Whybrow with all the defiance of youth and easy success stands her ground, cold and dignified. Thomas, consumed by jealousy, makes the sexual accusation and despite her powerful position, is losing against the younger woman's sang froid. David Tennant and Jaqueline Defferary do battle tenaciously. It's hard to warm up to Robin Soans' cycling fitness alcoholic or Nigel Lindsay's netaholic.

The director Ramin Gray has given the cast defining body language in their confrontations. The scene between Angelika and Sabine is especially electricifying, sparky and tough. At one point, in the middle scene, Patrizia puts her foot on the table, both sexually provocative and asserting her strength. The modern corporate set is a shiny table, glass and chrome, a carpeted office and smoked glass corridors. I look forward to seeing more of Roland Schimmelpfennig's refreshing plays.

Push Up

Written by Roland Schimmelpfennig
Directed by Ramin Gray

With: Peter Sproule, Sian Thomas, Lucy Whybrow, David Tennant, Jaqueline Defferary, Robin Soans, Nigel Lindsay, Flaminia Cinque
Design and Lighting Design: Rodney Grant
Sound design: Ian Dickinson
Running time: One hour thirty minutes with no interval
Box Office: 020 7565 5000
Booking to 2nd March 2002
Reviewed by Lizzie Loveridge based on 13th February 2002 performance at the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, the Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square, London SW1

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