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Rooms: A Rock Romance

(New World Stages; 340 seats; \$69.50 top) A Van Hill Entertainment, Red Griffin Media presentation of a musical in one act with music and lyrics by Paul Scott Goodman, book by Goodman and Miriam Gordon. Directed by Scott Schwartz. Choreography, Matt Williams.

Ian Wallace - Doug Kreeger
Monica P. Miller - Leslie Kritzer

By [STEVEN SUSKIN](#)

Off Broadway has a potential hit in "Rooms," Paul Scott Goodman's "rock romance." Goodman's varied and impressive score combines with Scott Schwartz's canny staging and strong performances from Leslie Kritzer and Doug Kreeger to offset a certain inevitability in the plot. The talents of all involved result in an entertaining and enjoyable affair.

This is a rock musical in relatively traditional mode, as opposed to the more cutting-edge "Rent" or "Spring Awakening." While a portion of the story is set in the punk-rock world circa 1977, the dramaturgy is strictly in boy-meets-girl mode.

Monica (Kritzer), a self-proclaimed Glasgow "Scottish Jewish Princess" and a lyricist in search of a composer, meets poor Catholic boy Ian (Kreeger), who lives locked in his room with a guitar in one hand and a bottle in the other. They write a song on commission -- an outrageous bisexual bat mitzvah number that tells us there's "a lot more gefilte fish left in the sea" -- and win a local contest that nets them bus tickets to London.

The ambitious Monica gets them a recording contract as punk duo Lillian Filth and Perry Comatose, and they soon have a No. 1 hit. Soon they're in New York, where they discover -- surprise, surprise -- that their relationship is more than simply professional.

It's at this point, halfway in, that momentum halts. Given the presence of only two actors, even a precocious pre-teen could forecast the second-half trajectory. Yes, the suddenly (and strangely belatedly) romantic couple quickly break up when Ian's drunkenness sabotages their debut at CBGB; and yes, by the time the curtain comes down, they are finally back together. What else can you do with a two-character musical?

That said, Goodman's songs keep us involved. They range from tender to tough, introspective to brash, and punk rock to good old showbiz; the music is often inventive, and the lyrics are laced with delightful images.

Kreeger makes an attractive and sympathetic hero, which is not easy to do with that ever-present bottle of Clan MacGregor. Kritzer, meanwhile, takes command again and again. She has made something of a name for herself in recent years, with featured spots as the bride-to-be in "A Catered Affair" and earlier this season as the man-eating cabbie in the Encores! revival of "On the Town." Here she holds the stage with good comic instincts and a big voice.

Scottish composer Goodman's 1999 show "Bright Lights, Big City" was staged at New York Theater Workshop with high

expectations but little success. "Rooms," which he wrote with wife Miriam Gordon as co-librettist, has been in the works since then, including a 2005 visit to the New York Musical Theater Festival. Present version was initially mounted last July as a co-production by MetroStage (in Alexandria, Va.) and Geva Theater Center (in Rochester). Story is roughly suggested by Goodman's early career in Glasgow; Ian is based on his collaborator at the time, with Goodman apparently serving as a model for the Monica character.

Director Schwartz does an impressive job, building his entire production on the use of one prop -- a door in a movable frame -- which serves to define the many rooms of the title. Choreographer Matt Williams, who lately contributed the Condoleezza Rice dance interlude in Will Ferrell's Bush bash, makes the most of his one big spot here, the boisterous punk number "All I Want Is Everything." Jesse Vargas provides orchestrations for the six-man rock band, and lighting designer Herrick Goldman does some especially effective work.

It's not quite a totally successful musical, but "Rooms" provides a jolt of entertainment to the current Off Broadway scene, with two performers well worth watching.

Musical numbers: "Rooms," "Steps," "The Music," "Bring the Future Faster," "Friday Night Dress," "Scottish Jewish Princess," "I Love You for All Time," "Let's Go to London," "All I Want Is Everything," "Let's Leave London," "NYC Forever!" "Little Bit of Love," "Fear of Flying," "Happiness," "Clean," "My Choice," "New Song for Scotland."

Set, Adam Koch; costumes, Alejo Vietti; lighting, Herrick Goldman; sound, Jon Weston; music supervision/orchestrations, Jesse Vargas; production stage manager, Sara Jaramillo. Opened March 16, 2009. Reviewed March 11. Running time: 1 HOUR, 30 MIN.

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