

FILL IN THE BLANK

By T.H. McCulloh

Publication: [Back Stage West](#)

Date: [Thursday, March 6 2003](#)

The nice thing about a smorgasbord is that there's a big variety on the table. You can eat a plateful of everything or pick and choose. That's also the nice thing about this theatrical smorgasbord of six of David Ives' [comic](#) one-acts. There's a startling variety of material and styles, all tasty and all tongue in cheek. And there's something here for everyone.

Ranging from a spoof of English murder mysteries to a sort of ersatz Walter Mitty saga about a man who wakes up one morning and decides to be Edgar Degas for the day, Ives' bright sense of [humor](#) also ranges from subtle to blatant, from physical to esoteric. The directors of these one-acts also have their tongues firmly in their cheeks, correctly playing each piece dead serious, the only way comedy can work. One of the funniest, especially for David Mamet fans, is [Speed-the-Play](#), a competition for those who can capsule some of Mamet's works the best, and the funniest Mamet spoof is [Sexual Perversity in Chicago](#), an all-out bang-up moment that would have Mamet spinning in his plush [Hollywood](#) chair, when the two randy young men (Travis Schuldt, Steve Heller) solve their loneliness after losing their girls in each other's arms and lips. Directed by Darin Anthony with exquisite timing and marvelous rhythms, it sparks the evening.

At the other end of the comedy scale, Richard Kline's beautifully restrained husband in Degas, C'est Moi is a subtle joy under Daniel Henning's equally well-restrained direction, as Kline floats sublimely through an ordinary modern day as the French impressionist. Taking its cue from the stereotypical attitudes of construction workmen, [Mere Mortals](#), directed with deadpan macho earnestness by James Kerwin, has Heller, Bill Dempsey and Jeff McCredie, with hard hats and lunch buckets, firmly admitting that they are famous folk who got lost in the shuffle of childhood.

These are highlights, followed closely in humor and insight by [The Mystery of Twicknam Vicarage](#), the Brit spoof; [Captive Audience](#), which could keep anyone from their boob tube, and [Seven Menus](#), a sort of La Ronde at a pretentious café. They're all charming, and stylishly and honestly played by the whole company, across the board able to keep a straight face even during the lengthy laughs.

"Fill in the Blank," presented by the Blank Theatre Company at 2nd Stage Theatre, 6500 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood. Thurs.- Sat. 8 p.m., Sun. 2 p.m. Feb. 22-Mar. 30. \$25. (323) 661-9827.