

The Shomer Play – A Review

A Review of a Brilliant New Play by Playwright Avi Pruzansky

William Cane

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Playwright **Avi Pruzansky** has a way with words—and staging. I saw his new work, *The Shomer Play*, on February 24, 2025, in a packed Off-Off Broadway theater filled with laughing, cheering people who loved it as much as I did.

The plot revolves around a young couple who try to navigate the challenging Jewish practice of *shomer negiah*, which prohibits guys and girls from touching before marriage.

Talk about an obstacle to love!

Although the practice is intended to foster deep understanding and spiritual growth in a couple—which theoretically should lead to a more permanent union—it's obvious that the restriction placed on the two lovebirds in this play leads to trouble, misunderstandings, and endless humorous dramatic conflict.

Like the romantic banter between Alma and the young doctor in Tennessee Williams's *Summer and Smoke*, and the many lovers' quarrels in Molière's plays, **Avi Pruzansky** defines the relationship between his two romantic leads with all the roller-coaster ups and downs an audience enjoys seeing.

Perfectly staged by director **Michaela Bailey**, the opening of the romance features the girl and her cousin stage left, and the boy and his uncle stage right. In a sophisticated back and forth, the two lovers notice each other and make eye contact. The conversation shifts from one group (the girl and her cousin) to the other (the boy and his uncle). You could hear squeals of delight from the audience as they followed the course of this heartwarming and funny conversation!

Such a modern staging device goes even beyond what Molière and Tennessee Williams do to get their romances going: it's a wonderful example of **Avi Pruzansky's** mastery of

innovative technique. The actors pause almost in a freeze frame as the focus shifts first stage right, then stage left, and back and forth through the mesmerizing and memorable scene.

Anastasia Liodori delivers a sensitive and powerful performance as the romantic female lead. **Frankie Otis** exudes charisma as well as vulnerability as the male lead. **Robin Brenner** shines as the girl's concerned mother in a deep and powerful portrayal of a woman torn in two directions by her faith and her emotional connection with her child. **Hadar Baron** is electrifying as the freewheeling cousin. **Ken Dillon** is hysterical as the sometimes crazy uncle. And **Benjamin Paulk** is wonderfully convincing and comically adept as the boy's friend and confidant.

Young **Avi Pruzansky** has all the makings of an accomplished up-and-coming American playwright. We look forward to many more breakthrough dramatic creations from him.

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