

# BUZZ CENTER STAGE

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## THE BETTER HALF: A RICH, BUTTERY, AND ZESTY NEW PRODUCTION AT STEPPENWOLF FEATURED

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As the house lights dimmed and the actors took to the stage, an odd play began to unfold at Steppenwolf's 1700 Theater. Lights appeared to direct the actors where to go, the actors didn't act as though they were acting, and perched on my corner aisle seat actresses raced by to leap onto the backs of other actors. I wondered if having that second glass of wine was a good idea. But what was unfolding before me was a beautiful, complex, original, and exquisitely choreographed production of *The Better Half* presented by Lucky Plush Productions.

*The Better Half* is a dance-theater spin on the 1944 psychological thriller *Gaslight*, directed by George Cukor. Launching from this classic film, layers of fiction and reality accumulate, revealing the elusive boundaries between performer and character, actual and scripted relationships, life versus borrowed plot lines. Ultimately a new narrative emerges, capturing the habitual patterns, escapist tendencies, and resilience in contemporary relationships through a complex mix of dance and theater languages.

Rhoads and Danzig approached the staging of *The Better Half* with a commitment to actual experience. The performers are first and foremost themselves. They are assigned characters. The thriller plot is handed to them. The imposed elements cause the performers to react, and their reactions further the plot. The actual effects on the performers in trafficking between the composed plot and the live circumstances deliver a coherent narrative arc that grapples with fact and illusion, life and art and the way these opposites can get entangled.

The 1700 Theater is Steppenwolf's newest theater; a casual, intimate and flexible 80-seat space dedicated to showcasing the work of ensemble and emerging local theater companies. With the entrance conveniently located through the bar, it set the mood perfectly for the avant garde production. This surprising, confusing, and intriguing play made for a more unusual theatrical experience than the normal Chicago theater soon. It pairs best with a crisp chardonnay.

On November 10 and 17, take advantage of a discounted Lucky Plush Saturday double feature with a work-in-progress showing of *Rink Life* at 5 pm, and the signature Lucky Plush work *The Better Half* at 8 pm. Tickets are available through November 17th and can be purchased at <https://www.steppenwolf.org>.