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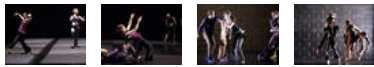
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# Live review | Lucky Plush Productions: The Better Half

By William Frederking Thu Oct 27 2011

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Photograph: William Frederking

Julia Rhoads, left, and Meghann Wilkinson in *The Better Half*

*The Better Half*, [Lucky Plush Productions'](#) new dance-theater piece, at the [MCA Stage](#) through November 6, is built of surfaces, thin to the point of transparency, stacked and fragile like phyllo. Heather Gilbert's design lays rectangles of light on the bare stage like area rugs; most of the time, the five performers treat their edges like walls. The cast's roles, assigned at the top of the show by a narrator seated among the audience (former Blue Man Tim Heck), are worn somewhat disdainfully, as if bridesmaids' dresses. The show reboots a few times before its starter finally catches, and the engine of its overlapping story fragments turns over.

These narratives come from a variety of scripts for films. *Gaslight* is one, *The Bourne Identity* is another. Two Hal Hartley screenplays, for *Flirt* and *Trust*, contribute excerpts; *All the Real Girls* and *Scenes from a Marriage* round out the source material. But a lot of the text is custom cowritten by the show's principal creators, [LPP artistic director Julia Rhoads](#) and [Leslie Buxbaum Danzig](#) of [500 Clown](#). Rhoads performs

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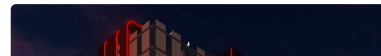
The players' disorientation with their roles of discontent in them is initially played for laughs. He and the maids of the Manningham household—impudent, young Nancy and dutiful, sad old Elizabeth—Kim Goldman and Meghann Wilkinson all but literally roll their eyes. Goldman tries on the other dancers' signature movements in a beautiful solo sequence but, having wandered too far out of line as both a servant within the story and a servant to the show, she is brusquely cut short.

After the crew takes a hilarious trip to through the Manningham's invisible home, looking for clues with Detective Rough (also played by Heck), the throughline gets hijacked and other scenelets barge in. (A witty touch: One is *The Bourne Identity's* romantic carjacking in Zurich.) Mr. Danzig and Rhoads stay coupled, however, and their emotions begin to seem more real, forged as these narrative splinters catch fire, very *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.

Mikhail Fiksel's sound design is ingenious, a mix of Foley effects, cinematic mood-setting and a low-level, between-stations radio static, subtle echoes of these five people half-trying to tune into their purposes in each other's lives. But the score gets too loud at times to catch all of the actors' lines; they don't wear microphones, although there are a few on the stage apron and one that drops in and out from above. Also, in earlier stages—I saw two in-progress showings—*The Better Half* ran at a breakneck pace, skipping like a spinning stone across its surfaces like a perfect piece of pop art. It's more measured now, which tames the thrill, but it still grabs you and still gives you the same [Roy Lichtenstein kiss](#).

The Better Half continues at the MCA Stage on October 29 and November 3, 5 and 6. The October 28 performance has been canceled due to injury. Ticket holders may exchange for a different date by calling 312-397-4010.

An Atari-themed hotel is opening up in Chicago and 7 other U.S. cities: [bit.ly/314H670](https://bit.ly/314H670)



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