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Theater review: Funny is the word for 'Blankity-Blank' at Theatre Three

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Fill in the blank: *Blankity-Blank* is as funny as _____. The songs are pretty great, too.

On Monday, Theatre Three opened the world premiere of Scott Warrender's new musical in its basement space. I hope you came up with a really positive metaphor to put in the space above. This inspired bit of silliness will have you in enough stitches to close up major surgery.

Before the show, actors approach audience members to ask them to supply funny words. It's like that parlor game that crunches unlikely ideas together to get a laugh. One character at the premiere performance even got a name that ran to nine syllables, more or less. (Sometimes the actors put in a few more for good measure.)

A plot of sorts underlies this comic device. Christopher J. Deaton's character meets Arianna Movassagh's in a bar. It later turns out he's her new boss. She's replacing the character played by Julie Johnson, because the latter is about to star in a show. Gregory Lush is the guy who makes photocopies and feels left out of company parties, until he gets laid off. Eventually, the two former workers seek revenge on their former employer.

Marisa Diotalevi plays a number of smaller parts and carries most of the burden of narration. She also gets the show's funniest song, which is about not being able to sing.

A lot of the show is self-referential in that way. Among recent musicals that take this approach, *Blankity-Blank* closely resembles *Urinetown* in its pessimistic mood and satirical tone. Warrender's score, however, is superior to most other examples of this budding genre.

This first production, staged by K. Doug Miller with musical direction by Vonda K. Bowling, could hardly be bettered. Deaton and Johnson's singing is, in a word, stupendous. It's a thrill to hear voices with so much power in such a small space. Lush and Movassagh are also at their considerable best, and even the supposed non-singer Diotalevi does well in the ensembles.

This is as delightful a musical premiere as Dallas has seen to date. One of the characters jokes about an audience member who thought he was coming to see *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change!*. This new piece is actually just as entertaining, and its music is far more arresting and memorable.

PLAN YOUR LIFE: Through June 13 at Theatre Three, 2800 Routh St. Runs 140 mins. \$25 to \$30. 214-871-3300, www.theatre3dallas.com.