

# REVIEWS

## *Lingua Franca*

Peter Nichols' play about a group of expatriate teachers in Florence gets an involving, well-acted production.

**David Finkle** • **New York City** • **Nov 16, 2010**



Ian Gelder, Chris New, and Charlotte Randle  
in *Lingua Franca*  
(© Ari Mintz)

Peter Nichols' involving *Lingua Franca*, now at 59E59 Theaters as part of the "Brits Off Broadway" series, is a meditation on the loss of innocence and disillusionment that spread through Europe during the decade following World War II. Under Michael Gieleta's fine-tuned direction, the cast does its utmost, but they can't completely overcome the text's disruptive flaws.

The show begins with the ensemble facing upstage in the dark; they're meant to represent tourists in Florence, who are looking at a projection of Masaccio's "Expulsion from the Garden of Eden," the famous renaissance fresco on the walls of the Santa Maria Del Carmine church.

Soon, though, we meet the play's characters: Gennaro Manetti (Enzo Cilenti), the owner of a

Florentine foreign-language school, and his ragtag staff: English expats Steven Flowers (Chris New), Jestin Overton (Ian Gelder) and Peggy Carmichael (Charlotte Randle), Aussie lesbian expat Madge Fox (Abigail McKern), Russian émigré Irena Brentano (Anna Carteret) and German visitor Heidi Schumann (Natalie Walter).

The group gathers and disperses over a period of several weeks in the Lingua Franca teachers' ante-room (designed for shabby grandeur by James Macnamara). The harried teachers are occasionally highlighted (in James Smith's isolated lighting squares) as they teach their classes with varying degrees of enthusiasm ("This is a knife," "This is a fork") and unseen students react (Will Jackson's sound augmentations). From time to time, they also hold one-sided conversations, again with unseen students.

The focal mentor is Flowers, whom theatergoers with good memories will remember from Nichols' *Privates on Parade* and who may be a version of Nichols, who once taught English in an Italian Berlitz emporium. Now, an embittered drifter in love with Florence after two days, he alienates his first class, is instantly fired by Gennaro but finagles a reprieve with Peggy's help. As a result, painfully lovelorn Peggy jumps to the conclusion that she and Steven are an item. She doggedly fails to notice he's having an affair with naïve but sexy Heidi, despite Heidi's impassioned defense of Hitler and her disdain for Jews.

Although there are several incidents plaguing Gennaro's shaky institute -- including a public assault on the positive-thinking Jestin for coming on to a young girl -- the lop-sided Steven-Heidi-Peggy triangle is the dramatic core, and its denouement throws the hitherto temperate, though solemn, play severely off-kilter.

Several times in *Lingua Franca*, Jestin mentions E. M. Forster's minor classic, *A Room With a View*, also set in Florence, once specifically noting: "Second time around, it's not a masterpiece, more of a period piece--not much to do with life today in England, too shy, nervous, sensitive, an old-fashioned idea of the Englishman as one who shivered on the brink, afraid to get his feet wet." What Nichols shows here is that a half-century after the publication of Forster's book, the English have come to a far more spiritually diminished place.



## Want more stories like these?

Get theater news, interviews, videos, exclusive ticket discounts, and more.

# AROUND THEATERMANIA

Most Viewed

Most Shared



Broadway Participants in 2015 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade Announced



Seth Rudetsky's *Disaster!* Will Play Broadway With Kerry Butler, Adam Pascal, and More



Hayden Tee to Join *Les Misérables* as Broadway's Next Javert



Christopher Fitzgerald, Keala Settle, and More Join Jessie Mueller in Broadway's *Waitress*



Wayne Brady in Party Dress and Heels as *Kinky Boots*' Lola



*Frasier* and *It Shoulda Been You*'s Edward Hibbert to Join *Something Rotten!*

# THEATERMANIA

---

[Broadway](#)

[Off-Broadway](#)

[Off-Off-Broadway](#)

[Discount Tickets](#)

[News and Reviews](#)

[Video](#)

[All Cities](#)

[Theater News](#)

[Reviews](#)

[Photo Flashes](#)

[TM Magazine](#)

[Boston Theater](#)

[Chicago Theater](#)

[Las Vegas Theater](#)

[London Theater](#)

[Los Angeles Theater](#)

[Miami Theater](#)

[New York Theater](#)

[Philadelphia Theater](#)

[San Francisco Theater](#)

[Seattle Theater](#)

[Washington D.C. Theater](#)

[Minneapolis / St. Paul](#)

[About Us](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Jobs](#)

[Subscribe to our newsletter](#)

[Email Preferences](#)

[Unsubscribe](#)

[Services](#)

[- Listings](#)

[- Advertising](#)

[- Ticketing](#)

THEATERMANIA PRESENTS  
**GOLDCLUB**

[Learn More](#)

[!\[\]\(41aea2746216b27a6939d696d8e035da\_img.jpg\) Facebook](#)

[!\[\]\(7bc43b319a082987e20f7bf78f4bab80\_img.jpg\) Google+](#)

[!\[\]\(e50091943b385fe16d3277389202856f\_img.jpg\) Twitter](#)

[!\[\]\(4436e6b00b9d5e62c2a161129eb3e4d0\_img.jpg\) Pinterest](#)

[!\[\]\(179f167ede0522ebb4ea025b3ad78ca7\_img.jpg\) Tumblr](#)

[!\[\]\(4a7b4ce770af8456e11a71f9565c8c2b\_img.jpg\) Subscribe to our RSS Feed](#)

By providing information about entertainment and cultural events on this site, TheaterMania.com shall not be deemed to endorse, recommend, approve and/or guarantee such events, or any facts, views, advice and/or information contained therein.

©1999 - 2015 **TheaterMania.com, Inc.** All Rights Reserved. [Terms of Use & Privacy Policy](#)