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# BWW Reviews: Stages Repertory Theatre's VERONICA'S ROOM is a Blood-Curdling Thriller

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by David Clarke

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Ira Levin is best known for his suspenseful and creepy novels *The Stepford Wives* and *Rosemary's Baby*, both of which have been adapted into successful films. His 1978 play DEATHTRAP holds the record for the longest running comedy-thriller in Broadway history, playing almost 1800 performances across a four-year run. Despite positive reviews and a healthy run, his 1973 play VERONICA'S ROOM just didn't capture audiences the way his other works did. Thrills, chills, and horror are hard to make affective in a staged play; however, Stages Repertory Theatre's production of VERONICA'S ROOM delivers these aspects in abundance.

A common theme amongst the works of Ira Levin is that nothing is as it seems. Even when you think you've got it all figured out, he adds another little twist here and there to keep audiences on their toes. Walking into VERONICA'S ROOM, I was expecting things to quickly devolve into horrific scenarios; yet, the terror is saved for the second act. His first act is light and sprinkled with comedy. The situation seems innocent enough, but knowing we're seeing a play by a master of the thriller genre, the audience is at a quiet unease. Something is wrong in Veronica's room, but we can't quite grasp it. We're sent into intermission thinking about the quirky characters and just how strange the play seems. The second act runs us over like a freight train, exemplifying sinister depravity and playing with our psyches. Gasps emanate from the audience, and the last 20 minutes leave us stunned.

Josh Morrison's taut direction for the production pulls the audience in with the play's humor. His perfectly selected cast beguiles us with warmth and mirth for much of the first act. Josh Morrison also attends to small details, such as Sally Edmundson's The Woman checking the locks on the door towards the end of the first act to raise our blood pressure. For the second act, all the screws swiftly tighten and he skillfully glues us to The Edge of our seats for a disturbing and hair-raising journey to the climax and through the play's shocking resolution.

The suspense in the show lies in the unnerving and ongoing confrontation between Sally Edmundson's The Woman and Teresa Zimmermann's The Girl. At the top of the show, Sally Edmundson's doting character charms with tender smiles and a sweet Irish brogue. As the play progresses and her exterior persona gives way, Sally Edmundson impressively frightens both the audience and the girl. Likewise, Teresa Zimmermann excels at bringing remarkable heart to her relatable and somewhat naïve character. As the show grows increasingly darker, the audience feels just as trapped in the suffocating room as she does. We root for her, and Teresa Zimmermann makes every torture she endures affect us.



James Belcher's The Man is well acted and full of his own revelations, many of which I cannot mention or I'd ruin the entire play. At the top of the show he has the audience giggling at his antics, but by the end of the play, the audience is flabbergasted because of his resolute commitment to a fascinatingly twisted arc. In a similar way, Dwight Clark's

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The Young Man surprises the audience too as he delivers a laudable performance in the limited role.

Kirk Domer's Scenic Design fantastically embodies the early 1930s. We are quickly told that Veronica's room has been closed off to the world since her passing in 1935. Naturally, Kirk Domer fills the stage with well-chosen antiques and trinkets that fit the period and are splendid to observe.

Tiffani Fuller's Costume Design and Jodi Bobrovsky's Properties Design highlight both the 30s and 70s. Despite the 1935 set, the play takes place in 1973. Both of these skillful artists bring to life both eras, grounding the script in a reality that is easy to visualize and period specific.

One of the most auspicious and daring surprises in the production is **Christina Giannelli's** bright Lighting Design. Instead of relying on heavy shadows and dim lighting, she keeps the stage brightly lit for a majority of the production. Every action is clearly visible, adding even more horror to what we witness.

With Halloween just around the corner, Stages Repertory Theatre is giving audiences a seasonally appropriate treat with a delightfully blood-curdling production of **Ira Levin's** VERONICA'S ROOM. Due to mature content, leave the little ghouls at home and enjoy a spine-tingling evening at the theatre with friends or loved ones.

Running Time: 1 hour and 47 minutes with a 15 minute intermission.

VERONICA'S ROOM, produced by Stages Repertory Theatre, plays the Yeager Stage at Stages Repertory Theatre, 3201 Allen Parkway, Suite 101, Houston, 77019 now through November 3, 2013. Performances are Wednesdays and Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays at 8:00 p.m., and Sundays at 3:00 p.m. For more information and tickets, please visit <http://stagestheatre.com> or call (713) 527 - 0123.

Photos by Bruce Bennett. Courtesy of Stages Repertory Theatre.



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