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EASTWOOD CIVIC ASSOCIATION **18TH ANNUAL EASTWOOD HISTORIC HOME TOUR!** **SAT. OCT. 19 | SUN. OCT. 20 | NOON-5:00PM** ESTABLISHED IN 1913 DEED RESTRICTED COMMUNITY



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Stage

Veronica's Room: An American Gothic Horror Story That Spirals Into Depravity

By Jim J. Tommaney Tue., Oct. 15 2013 at 7:00 AM
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Photo by Bruce Bennett

Teresa Zimmermann portrays a young girl facing strange events in Veronica's Room at Stages.

The set-up:

Playwright Ira Levin can tackle epic themes - Satan himself in the film *Rosemary's Baby* and a nascent Nazi re-emergence in *The Boys from Brazil*, for example -- and is equally adept at claustrophobic drama, such as the five-character, one-set *Deathtrap*, the longest running comedy thriller ever on Broadway, with 1,793 performances. *Veronica's Room* falls in the closet genre, with four characters, one-set and the sense of looming danger, unexpected twists and suspense for which Levin is famous.

The execution:

An elderly couple have discovered a young woman and her newly-met date at a restaurant, and persuaded them to accompany them to a mansion to view a photograph of Veronica,

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the deceased occupant of the mansion, to whom the young girl bears a striking resemblance. The girl is further persuaded to dress up as Veronica, to provide some forgiveness to a woman dying of cancer and delusional. These introductions form the heart of the short, 45-minute first act, and the suspense is wondering what tricks Levin has up his sleeve, and the pleasure is in seeing consummate actors at work.

[Check out our interview with director Josh Morrison](#)

Sally Edmundson and James Belcher portray the elderly couple, and mesh seamlessly into their roles, providing the same distinctive acting they had displayed in the two-hander *The Unexpected Man* at Stages last year. I wondered if Edmundson wasn't exaggerating the elderly walk, and later realized that was exactly what Levin wanted me to think, at that point in the play. This is a mystery story, an American Gothic horror drama that begins simply, then spirals downwards into depravity, as it rises in suspense and excitement.

The young girl is portrayed by Teresa Zimmermann, who is persuasive and interesting, in a very complex and difficult role as she attempts to comprehend increasingly strange events. The young man is portrayed by Dwight Clark, who has a minor role in Act One but turns in an impressive performance in a late and powerful re-emergence in Act Two.

I dare say no more of the plot, but should note that the material is strong stuff, not for the weak of heart, as Levin has pulled back a curtain on the tortured extremes to which humans can resort, and asked us to join him on a voyage into the heart of darkness.

The success of the play rests on its lengthier Act Two, as surprise is piled on surprise, and is helped enormously by the set (scenic design by Kirk Domer and properties design by Jodi Bobrovsky). The play is set in a town a half-hour from Boston, in an autumn evening, in 1973, but the bedroom has been maintained as it was in 1935, and the period authenticity rings true in all the details.

Josh Morrison directed, and he keeps the pace appropriate for whatever deception or ruse is on deck at a given moment. And the gifted acting involves us enough to suspend disbelief at what is a curiously far-fetched initial premise. The motivations of the characters are left somewhat ambiguous, though their actions are not, and audience members may exit still pondering and musing on some truly startling events. This is not the kind of mystery that is wrapped up neatly and tied with a bow at its conclusion - in fact, far from it.

The verdict:

Consummate acting and unexpected events take us on an entertaining, gripping roller-coaster ride, from a proven master of suspense.

Veronica's Room continues through November 3 at Stages, 3201 Allen Parkway. For information or ticketing, call 713-527-0123 or contact www.stagestheatre.com.

Location Info



Stages Repertory Theatre
3201 Allen Parkway, Houston, TX
Category: General

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