Cultural Daily

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InHouse Theatre Presents Private Eyes

Charity Hume · Wednesday, May 18th, 2016

Under the brilliant direction of Rob Welsh, a talented ensemble of sterling performances from the actors of InHouse Theatre imbue *Private Eyes* by Steven Dietz with the gorgeous tonalities of infidelity in its most erotic and human moments. Setting this company apart from traditional staging approaches, InHouse offers audiences 3D realism in an immersive experience of "clandestine observation," as the plays are shown "on site" in "houses, lobbies, bars & restaurants, and backyards," and even bedrooms.

The sense of conspiracy and mystery begins with the first "secret of the night" – When purchasing tickets, the audience is merely given an address, and does not previously know what type of building or interior they will visit for the play. Director Rob Welsh explained why InHouse deliberately keeps the audience in the dark: "The less information the audience has for a venue, the easier it is to transform that space for them. It becomes a party that they're invited to and it elevates the experience, if they simply have an address and don't know what to expect. "

Welsh expressed some of the reasoning for choosing the venue for *Private Eyes*: "You enter a nondescript brick building near La Brea and Wilshire, and immediately find an ascending staircase as your only option. As you get to the second floor it opens into a lobby. There are couches, chairs, benches; places for actors to wait. There are rooms down the hall with camera and lighting equipment and computers and TV monitors. I'm an actor, myself, and I've been in dozens of these rooms all over town. This is where actors go to audition. We must transform the space for ourselves with our imagination when we perform audition scenes so it is only fitting that we have literally transformed the space around us."

We follow the plot line while filing down corridors of casting photographs, and find a room where we can listen in on the next shoot. In secretive whispers, actors cue the audience to tiptoe, to listen in, to give the actors privacy, to settle down in a back part of a restaurant so that the characters can be heard, or overheard.

In his "Author's Notes," Dietz confesses that *Private Eyes* began with a lie, and the lovers' deceptions are echoed by the conscious ironies that Dietz employs, as he "deceives" the audience in a sequence of scenes. After we have accepted that the very first scene presents two lovers who have never met, we subsequently learn that these characters, Matthew and Lisa, are in fact married and have known one another for years. In this first shift, it's clear that this is a play where the audience can't predict alliances, which makes the whole evening into a delightful whodunit, as we begin to unwind the layers of acting in the nested narrative that only begins to explain itself when we are again caught unawares. The rhythm of not knowing, or surprises begins a kind of labyrinth of premises, echoed by the physical path of different scenes down corridors, and back rooms, that mimic the "memory palace" implied by the construct of each character's daydreams, memories, and fantasies. In another room, we will re-consider the whole relationship, in a completely

different light.

Herein lies the genius of Inhouse's philosophy. Just as Dietz's play keeps the audience in the dark for the first scene, the subsequent revelation that we are "only watching actors," nestles into the fact that we are *still* only watching actors, when each underlying truth is revealed. Complicit in constructing the imagined world that theater asks of any audience, this play calls into question its own pretending, as each subsequent scene refers to a new observer's reality, which cancels out the previous truth that we as audience conspired to pretend to believe. So we can't believe anyone, or anything, much like the lovers who are trying to figure out the strands of loyalty and deception in their own series of duplicitous dialogues

Caroline Morahan and Drew Rausch, Photos by Daud Sani

In the role of Lisa, Caroline Morahan beautifully and convincingly gives a feminine center to the vortex of sexual duplicity and energy that encircles the plots interweaving her lover, her husband, her husband's psychotherapist, and finally, her lover's jealous wife. Drew Rausch brilliantly conveys Matthew's associative thought process, almost succeeding in cancelling out his lower fantasies of jealousy, considering a more mature and forgiving response, as each idea wins or fails with varying degrees of success. In a further layering of self-consciousness, we are introduced to Frank, Matthew's psychotherapist, (Tim Redmond) who elicits a series of Matthew's fantasies in the interrogations of a typical therapy session: "Now Matthew, is that what *really* happened?" Mimicking the associative process, Redmond and Rausch's staccato duets win us to Matthew's madness as our sympathies find many aspects of ourselves in this quest to understand Matthew's accelerating ambivalence. As Adrian, Mark Sullivan plays the "other man" with subtle and powerful chemistry that lends an exquisite realism to the pain and pleasure of Lisa's temptation to give in to her attraction. But Adrian must submit to his own series of paradoxes, as he helplessly admits, that though he may have been the object of Lisa's love, "I'm jealous of a man whose wife is unfaithful to him." Further complexity arrives in the form of Cory, (Lara Maria Silva), Adrian's wife. Silva's darkly comic "Private Eye" simultaneously conveys both the violence of jealousy and a tongue-in-cheek noir performance that builds key momentum for the climax of the play.

Why is this play such a delight? As each subsequent allegiance gives the characters added dimension, the audience discovers the weightless quality of thought, epiphany, and random associations, as we are caught in scenes that are later revealed to be fantasies, revisions, and Freudian "wish-fulfillment." InHouse's intelligent and fast paced production of *Private Eyes* satisfies its audience with a quick witted, psychologically realistic, mental romp through a series of private lives that mock and mend us in a hilarious blend of honest examination and dark humor. The play's epiphanies are rich, and varied.

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