

FringeNYC 2005 Reviews - Page 5

GOD'S WAITING ROOM

reviewed by Michael Criscuolo

Ashlin Halfnight's terrific new play, *God's Waiting Room*, tells the story of four people languishing in Purgatory and re-living their collective downfall: Drummond, a drug dealer who hides his vocation from his dry-cleaner wife, Indira; Saskia, Drummond's rich artist girlfriend; and Bordo, Indira's deeply religious hired hand. Bordo believes that if they all re-enact the moment of their death—something no one else is particularly keen on doing—she will finally be able to pass into Heaven. Naturally, getting the others—who are all going through various permutations of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's five stages of death (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) even though they're already dead—will take some doing.

Halfnight's script (which is inspired by Mikhail Bulgakov's classic novel *The Master and Margarita*) makes expert use of foreshadowing and fractured narrative, and unfolds like a richly textured novel. The scenes detailing Drummond and Saskia's heated courtship, Indira's desperation to mend a marriage on the rocks, and the moments leading up to their collective demise are all evocative and telling. Halfnight knows exactly when to start and end each scene, including just enough information to make the audience fill in the blanks on their own.

Director Alexis Poledouris and designer Shaun Rance create an equally evocative Purgatory for *God's Waiting Room*: the actors are placed on either side of a large patch of grass that dominates the stage. The grass is the foursome's own stage, in a sense, since it is the only place where they can replay the scenes of their lives. (The grass is a hint as to where they bite the dust, FYI.) Otherwise, the characters remain in their not-so-neutral corners.

The entire cast is excellent. Rebecca Lingafelter's Indira burns with the manic desire of a suburban housewife fighting to keep tight control of her life. Elena Mulroney infuses Bordo with believable religious conviction and righteousness. Shelley Gershoni's Saskia is an emotional risk-taker, a convincing blend of maneater and sensitive artiste. And Jeffrey Clarke has a firm handle on Drummond's indifference and duplicity.

God's Waiting Room is presented by Performance Lab 115, a company worth keeping an eye on in the future, and is a great start (at least, for me) to this year's Fringe Festival.

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Last Updated: August 17, 2005

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