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BWW Review: LIDLESS provides dark drama at Horse Head Theatre Co.

by

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LIDLESS is an intense piece of theatre, and Horsehead Theatre's choice of intimate spaces makes it even more jarring. The play was written by Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig, and is billed as "a surreal drama about the aftermath of America's war on terror." The piece asks the audience to think about what happens to people once war is over and they have to return to their normal lives. It asks some hard questions about how America sees Muslims, and how we treat political prisoners. As with

any theatre that delves into the darkside of the American psyche, you may not enjoy some of the answers exposed. It's a well-timed production directed by Alison Christy, and one that should leave its mark on the Houston theatre scene.

We follow Alice who is a former interrogator at the Gitmo prison in Cuba's Guantanamo Bay. She remembers nothing thanks to pills that allow her to repress the more heavy sessions she performed on suspected terrorists. Her life is going fine, she's married with a daughter and running a flower shop. Then one day a strange Muslim man enters her shop and asks her to help him. He is in desperate need of a liver, and he knows they share the same blood type. He knows this because he was her prisoner, and he claims she owes him for the atrocities she put him through. Unknown to Alice, he also begins to befriend her curious teenage daughter who is unaware of her mother's true past.

The acting is natural and uncomfortably real throughout. The company is performing in a converted art studio, so the audience is literally inches away at any given moment. They are brave artists who never break the spell even when gasps or uncomfortable laughter scatter through the patrons. Mischa Hutchings takes on the incredibly tricky role of Alice, and has to play both sides of a woman at war and at peace. The inner turmoil within her is palpable and she gives an electrifying performance. Matching her beat for beat is Herman Gambhir who

plays Bashir, the humble yet desperate man who is coming for reparation of the past. The play works best when these two are face to face dealing with the uncomfortable history that only one of them seems to know fully.

Supporting the two leads is a trio of equally skilled actors. Rick Evans plays the loving husband, and Deeba Ashraf is the best friend. They are both nurturing and give much needed light to this blackened world. But perhaps most stunning is Tanith Albright's take on the teenage daughter discovering true darkness for the first time. She grapples with the idea of her mom as a force of evil, and tries to understand the nature of humanity when confronted with a man of different faith. Her voice becomes the heart of the show, and she gives a performance that competes easily with the stage veterans around her.

On the technical side of things the set is literally placed in a white box that serves normally as a small art studio in the Winter Street Galleries. The company has managed some nice lighting using inventive use of lamps, corner spots, and the fluorescents native to the space. There is a simplistic feel to the modular furniture that has to morph from living room, floral shop, to hospital ward. Costumes are sensible to represent the middle America landscape. Sound design is well executed and helps to drive the drama home.

LIDLESS runs an hour and a half without intermission, because breaking the tension would be unfair to the narrative build to the play. It's an experience that is not always comfortable, but is thoughtful and well executed. It doesn't shy away from some hard questions, and it feels rich and rewarding in doing so. Solid direction, a capable cast, and production design that allows the small space to feel fleshed out, all come together to make a powerful statement. This is a production that should be sought out by theatre patrons wanting something a little more powerful than a simple musical or another romantic comedy. LIDLESS is a play that looks at the darkest and lightest parts of our culture and our souls. It is a searing experience that will not soon be forgotten or shaken off.

LIDLESS only runs through June 18th at Winter Street Galleries located at 2101 Winter Street. Tickets can be purchased through the website found at <http://lidless.bpt.me>