

IN PERPETUITY THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSE

Critic tears this *Universe* another black hole

REVIEW BY JENNA SCHERER

You know that guy on the T, the one who rides the Red Line back and forth all day, loudly spewing his theories about government coverups, the Apocalypse, and naked mole rats running the US Postal Service? Imagine having to listen to him ramble on for two and a half hours, and you'll get a rough idea of what it's like to sit through Whistler in the Dark's production of *In Perpetuity Throughout the Universe*.

Granted, no one ever said it'd be easy to perform Eric Overmyer's over-long, overwritten play. Set in the dark heart of the mid-1980s, *In Perpetuity* follows a motley bunch of paranoid ghostwriters working at a shady publishing house in Lower Manhattan. The bulk of the comedy is taken up by the three central characters rattling out their various conspiracy theories in wordy, complicated monologues—everything from the Vatican as the “red whore of the Apocalypse” to finding traces of Jimmy Hoffa's remains in Central America.

they wander nervously around the stage like lemmings whose leader has abandoned them.

With his wordplay and PoMo meanderings, Overmyer doesn't give actors much room to breathe anyway. It doesn't help that most of the cast members don't have the acting chops to pull it off in the first place. Much of the blame lands on Kirk, who fails to bring a strong center to the production; her emotions fall on a range somewhere between unreasonable excitement and orgasmic frenzy. Her token office tryst with fellow ghost Dennis Wu (Tufts student Chuong Fam) is nothing if not cringeworthy; the pair suck face for a good minute or so at the end of some scenes, yet their chemistry is nonexistent. I felt as if I were watching the unpleasant beginnings of a one-night stand in which neither party was quite drunk enough. As for Lorna Nogueira, I was almost willing to forgive her for her cheesy performance as the head publisher—



for the rest of the “Blah, blah, crap we have to blah.” sit through.

The troupe's lofty self-proclaimed goal—“To produce work that rekindles the interest of a generation that has abandoned the theater”—won't fly too far if they keep performing work like this. It's hard enough to convince the ADD generation to see live theatre, and even harder with a script as impenetrable and a company as inexperienced as this one. It doesn't help that the play clocks in at nearly two and a half hours and that the folding wooden seats at the Charlestown Working Theater are hard as bedrock.

What's more, Overmyer's script dates itself from the get-go—we're still paranoid as hell today, but about terrorism, not the Cold War *frissons* his script fixates on. The characters' fears of Chinese hostile government take-over and KGB infiltration feel crushed over and irrelevant in the face of our modern obsessions. *In Perpetuity* plays more like a quaint artifact. This generation has its own shit to deal with, and its theatre needs to shift to reflect the changing climate.

This is fringe company Whistler in the Dark's flagship season, so you have to cut them some slack for biting off more than they can chew; but that doesn't mean we should have to watch it. ☹

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Meanwhile, up-and-coming ghost-writer Christine Penderecki (Stacey Kirk) pens a White Power B-grade novel for an eccentric and vaguely threatening skinhead (Travis Boswell). Oh, and also this really nebbishy guy (Alejandro Simoes) goes hide-your-women-and-children crazy over a running string of chain letters he's been receiving. Though there's a plot lurking somewhere in all this muck, nothing so much happens as gets talked about to death.

Director Ben Fainstein couldn't see out the other end of the script, either. For lack of something better to do, his actors overplay every scene;

but the dealbreaker came when she emerged halfway through the second act sporting a fur bikini and sing-speaking The Troggs' “Wild Thing.”

On the other hand, feisty blond Jennifer O'Connor provides a refreshing break from the actorly smugness that afflicts the rest of the cast. Fainstein didn't seem to do much in the way of directing, but he at least made the right choice in leaving the longest monologues to O'Connor. Also effective was Boswell as the sinister neo-Nazi writer Mr. Ampersand Qwerty, who brings a weighty and often alarming presence to the stage. Still, their two performances don't quite make up

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