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Theater J's production well worth seeing.

By: David Friscic Feb. 08, 2024



What an odd thing the human mind is! –for it can make false assumptions, construct facile rationalizations, and rely on preconceived notions---as the audience soon finds out through the alternately clever, character-driven, and coiling convolutions of Theater J's east coast premiere of the play *This Much I Know*. This is a play that asks questions more than it supplies answers and in that the audience can find sufficient satisfaction.

Playwright Jonathan Spector mixes his play with stories within stories as the audience tries to unravel two parallel narratives about extreme political ideologies. This play correctly links the mania and insanity from both these extreme ideologies ---one being that of white nationalism and the other that of Stalin's brutal repression. These narratives become mechanisms to explore what constitutes reasoning and logic.

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The lead character Lukesh (played with probing sharp intensity by Firdous Bamji) is a professor who uses the audience as his classroom, which adds an interactive element to the play and makes the audience complicit in the play's machinations. There are several layers to this intriguing jigsaw puzzle of a play.

The trio of actors (Mr. Bamji, Dani Stoller, and Ethan J. Miller) are all superb in bringing out the complexities of their characters. All the actors must take on differing accents and personas and they all make fluid and compelling transitions from one quicksilver scene to the next. I cannot mention much about what occurs in the play as it would spoil the surprising elements and approaches that occur courtesy of playwright Spector.

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The direction by Hayley Finn wisely emphasizes the taut pacing needed for the underlapping and interrelated narratives. Ms. Finn and playwright Spector emphasize the interconnections that people have (that reminded me of the play *Six Degrees of Separation*—this is a compliment). The concept of inattentional blindness (failure to notice things of paramount importance when a person’s attention is distracted) is continually stressed throughout the play.

The scenic design by Misha Kachman and the eye-catching and amusingly precocious projection design by Mona Kasra certainly aid in propelling the myriad themes of this intellectually intriguing play.

Perhaps making this play a bit shorter, --for example, ninety minutes compressed without intermission might make the play even stronger. The ideas and themes presented are stimulating and mentally exciting but so many colliding thoughts, enigmas, and puzzles played out without one solid shot-through catharsis can be daunting.

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In overall effect, though, the play presents an interesting and extremely perceptive look into the contradictions of the human mind –while concurrently allowing a look into two alternately frightening ideologies.

For the adventurous and discerning theatregoer, this production is produced with a very professional sheen and polish that makes Theater J's production well worth seeing.

Running Time: Two Hours and thirty minutes with one intermission

*This Much I Know* runs through February 25, 2024, at Theater J located at 1529 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036.

**Photo credit: Dani Stoller in Theater J's production of *This Much I Know*.**

**Photo by Ryan Maxwell Photography.**

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