



MIDWESTERN MYSTERY (left to right) Gretchen Hall & Leslie Hendrix in *7th Monarch*.

Photo: Carol Rosegg



Theater Review

7th Monarch is mysterious dramatic gem

7TH MONARCH

Written by Jim Henry

Directed by Scott C. Emblar

Through September 12, 2012

Theatre Row's Acorn Theatre

410 West 42nd Street

(212-279-4200), <http://www.7thmonarch.com>

By David NouNou

7th Monarch is one of those rare special gems that comes with little fanfare, has an unknown playwright, no box-office draws, but happens to be one of the most engrossing, thought-provoking, riveting dramas currently playing.

This is a play that could easily go unnoticed, but I, for one, would strongly urge any loving theatergoer to see this play. It has some holes, but it is never dull and one's interest never wanes nor wanders. After the first five minutes, you are interested in these characters and vested in the complexities of this drama.

It is best not to reveal anything about this play other than it is almost Hitchcockian in nature. As in any good mystery, the plot layers are peeled off one at a time and get the viewer involved deeper into the drama. The story is set in a small town in Indiana in 1991, where Miriam (Gretchen Hall), a math prodigy with a 173 IQ, has mysteriously dropped out of college 20 years ago and is living with her parents. In comes Raina (Leslie Hendrix), a Social Security official to speak to Miriam's parents, and the chain of events begin.

There are three other people in the show, but it is not necessary to know anything about them because it would reveal the plotline. For the theatergoer's pleasure, it is best they know as little as possible and just savor the twists and turns. The fact that the performers are not known entities makes the play seem that much more believable as a factual event rather than fiction. The performances by all are first-rate, especially Ms. Hall's and Ms. Hendrix's. They are both heart-wrenching. Mr. Embler's direction keeps the action moving at a brisk pace and elicits good performances from his actors, but a stronger hand was needed to fill in the holes in the play for better clarification. Special mention has to be made of Shoko Kambara's set. It is simple but truly versatile, and captures the essence of every scene.

7th Monarch will be running through September, and I strongly urge readers to see this enjoyable, unconventional play. With an interesting plotline, good performances and intelligent dialogue, what more can you ask from a theatrical outing? The less you know about it, the greater your pleasure.

Edited by Scott Harrah

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