

Boston Theatre Review – ‘Bug’ @ The Factory Theatre

Review by Brian Duffy; 08/05/2011



Flat Earth Theatre’s production of ‘Bug’, playing tonight and tomorrow at Boston’s Factory Theatre, is a gut-wrenching fever dream of desperation and paranoia. Written by Pulitzer Prize winner Tracy Letts, and directed by Jake Scaltreto, the play creates a mesmerizing microcosm of American-grade Fear.

Julie Becker crafts a remarkable performance as the guarded and forlorn Agnes, whose hostility and sarcasm can barely conceal the deep wounds of hopelessness. Her dead-end existence, tucked away in a motel room, is interrupted by a seemingly harmless drifter spending the night. Peter, played expertly by James Hayward, enters Agnes’ life like a lost puppy. His sensitive and quietly troubled demeanor invites her to shed her armor for one last furtive grasp at affection. However, the onset of their intimacy is coupled with a bizarrely coincidental infestation of tiny parasitic bugs that defy classification and resist all attempts at eradication.

So begins Peter’s downward spiral, weaving the ambiguously existent bugs into a sinister conspiracy theory that sucks both Agnes and the audience down a confounding rabbit hole where all boundaries of plausibility and sanity are blurred beyond repair. The hotel room is gradually turned into a tin-foil fortress, defending against the now obvious untrustworthiness of the world. Everything is connected, and everyone is in on it.

Hayward is positively incendiary as the unhinged Peter, crowned king of schizophrenia. Agnes in turn becomes the willing captive queen of paranoid delirium, and Becker makes her descent both believable and terrifyingly tragic. Stephen James Marco, Emily Hecht, and Tim Fairley all give outstanding supportive performances. I was especially struck by the production design, which elegantly adapts to the confines of the Factory Theatre, and whose visceral special effects unexpectedly bestowed this production with the classic horror film selling-point of a fainting audience member leaving in an ambulance.

If you’re reading this right now and are in Boston, get yourself to the Factory Theatre tonight or tomorrow night for an unforgettable experience. Grab a seat in the front row and find yourself locked in the hotel room along with the deranged couple, a claustrophobic elevator going straight to the Twilight Zone.