

Time Stands Still — unflinchingly current

4th April, 2012 | No Comments Yet and 2 Reactions

Time Stands Still

Reviewed by: Cassie Tongue on Tuesday 03 April 2012

At the top of the second act, Donald Margulies' *Time Stands Still* becomes meta-textual. A couple of characters, fresh from a night at the theatre, talk about political plays preaching to the choir of bleeding heart liberals and reaching no one else. After all, the dictators causing these atrocities of war, who are arguably the people who most need to see their victims' suffering explored, don't exactly take in a whole lot of theatre. They've got us there. But this is the kind of thing *Time Stands Still* wants to talk about. What impact do social issues really have on a first world audience? Does embedded journalism go too far? Can you love someone in a small and cozy apartment like you loved them in a war zone?



Time Stands Still — Darlington Theatre Company. Image by Nino Tamburri

Nominated for the Tony award for Best New Play in 2012, *Time Stands Still* introduces us to a worn-out, banged-up couple. Back home in New York City after yet another journalistic assignment in the Middle East, photojournalist Sarah and her writer boyfriend Jamie are trying to re-adjust to life without constant horror lurking around the next corner. Sarah has been injured, caught up in the blast from a car bomb, and Jamie is dealing with his own demons. The couple met overseas reporting on war and have lived and thrived in dangerous places and situations for almost nine years. Now they're home, ostensibly grounded while Sarah recovers, and suddenly the challenge of mundane, safe human life consumes them. How do you keep a relationship going without the constant adrenalin rush of capturing murder, death, battle? Why does their friend Richard's relationship with the much younger and much more optimistic Mandy seem to exist in a place where their own cannot?

This exploration is commonly tense and often funny. The language is taut and well-structured and in the hands of director Kim Hardwick the production hits all the right beats; everything hangs in the air as long as it needs to until the next idea snatches it out again and takes it away to have its own moment. The big moments and inevitable conflicts could easily have been over-dramatised but they are handled carefully, and the collective subtlety of the actors in this four-hander is what makes the heavy material not only work but feel like a real life.

It really is a strong cast; Richard Sydenham infused Jamie with an affable humor belying deep feeling, and Rebecca Rocheford Davies' Sarah was gruff, difficult, and appealingly vulnerable. They were well-matched. Their friend Richard, Noel Hodda, provided a much-needed bridge in the story between life at war and life at home as Sarah's editor, but in the hands of Hodda also managed to still be entirely accessible and a good grounding force for Sarah and Jamie. Young cast member Harriet Dyer, however, the playing young and naive Mandy, was the treat of the night and an absolute pleasure to watch on stage. She fluttered; she peppered her speech with Valley Girl-isms and earnest conversation fillers, and her warmth and sincerity added grace to the humour; if you laughed at her you loved her anyway. She earned the biggest and more generous laughs of the night, which in a play that is not a comedy should be treasured. She will go on to do great things.

Through the lens of a camera all you can see is a picture. *Time Stands Still* asks us if we'll see the beauty in the world or just the ugliness, and even though it's not that cut and dried and we're probably all in a middle ground, the play carries in itself a good reminder to consider the other viewpoints outside our own lens. To think about the world beyond our own narrow view. It's probably something we could all do well to remember.