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**THEATER REVIEW | 'WHISPER'**

## The Voices in Your Head Will Not Be Your Own



Peter S. Petralia

The three actors in Peter S. Petralia's "Whisper" are seen mostly in silhouette and shadow as they narrate and act behind a scrim.

By ANITA GATES  
Published: July 11, 2008

There have been suicides in your neighborhood, even one in your building. And there's something strange about the spot on the sidewalk where the man who jumped from his apartment landed. A storm is brewing too. And there are hushed voices in your head, guiding you through your memories and accompanying you on your day. Your very strange day.

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▶▶ Audio: Listen to an excerpt from 'Whisper' (mp3)

Peter S. Petralia's hypnotic "Whisper," running for only five performances at Performance Space 122, starts dark and gets darker. It doesn't always succeed in its theatrical goals, but it is an intriguing brush with altered reality.

The idea is to create the illusion that the story being told is for and about you and you alone. Each audience member wears headphones to enhance the effect. Arriving theatergoers are greeted with a gentle admonition, "Don't sit on your headphones." But other than provoking a passing thought ("Well, it would be funny if everybody else was listening to a completely different play"), the headphone effect is negligible. Maybe we've been desensitized by life in the iPod age or memories of phonetics classes.

What does have potency is the staging of "Whisper," with the cast of three — Alice Booth, Gillian Lees and Andrew Westerside — narrating (and acting) away behind a gauzy scrim for the duration of the performance, about an hour.

The actors are seen mostly in silhouette and shadow, controlled by the haunting, sometimes deliberately disorienting lighting effects by Rebecca M. K. Makus. The combination of Philip Reeder's music and Matt Russell's sound operation intensifies the mood. The storm is particularly satisfying, with the soothing, exciting noise of a rich, lush, all-encompassing rain that the audience can almost feel.

Mr. Petralia's script is often quite poetic. ("Sometimes time has holes in it.") And the production, which he also directed, flirts with the feel of a supernatural, psychological thriller. [M. Night Shyamalan's](#) current film, "The Happening," comes to mind.

But with much, much more left to the imagination.

*"Whisper" continues through Sunday at Performance Space 122, 150 First Avenue, at Ninth Street, East Village; (212) 352-3101, ps122.org.*

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