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## Theater review: 'The Uninvited' at Mechanicsburg's Little Theatre offers thrills, chills and more

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It might be heresy, but I am not afraid to admit that I enjoyed "The Uninvited," the Little Theatre of Mechanicsburg's latest production, more than I thought I would.

Most plays of this genre tend to be loud, busy and full of big moments. "The Uninvited" is a bit of an anomaly; for the most part, it is decidedly more nuanced and understated. Yet it still manages to provide suspense and thrills and comes off immensely satisfying.

Roderick Fitzgerald and his sister, Pamela, buy a house on the Cornish seacoast, never suspecting that it has a problem. Before long, Roderick and Pamela are visited by Stella Meredith whose late mother, it is said, is the house ghost. Stella's grandfather, Commander Beech, is close-mouthed on the issue, but it is clear he knows something that he is not telling.

Slowly, the Fitzgeralds begin to sense an evil spirit, making its presence known with unexpected chills. A great part of the drama revolves around a mysterious room. Once used as a child's nursery, the current occupants are repeatedly drawn to it, adding a dark aura to the air of secrecy permeating from within.

With clever direction from Lauri D. Rowley, the show comes across well-crafted and utterly facile. However, the staging of this production did not come easy. Jason Berenstein, cast in the role of Roddy, nearly lost his life in a traffic accident three weeks before opening. The emotional toll, on cast and crew alike, in moments such as these is immeasurable; the strength of this production lies in the ability of Ms. Rowley to seamlessly blend in a replacement on short notice.

The cast is uniformly fine, but special note must be made of Mary Sarah, as Miss Holloway, who gives an extremely penetrating performance. There is steeliness but never stridency in her portrayal; she burnishes every word, inflection and gesture in a way that keeps you focused on her during the entire time she is onstage.

Miranda Baldys, as Pamela, and Ryan Boyles, as Roddy, provide a suitably handsome and attractive brother-sister couple to steer events along. As the more farcical couple, they might be a bit broad, but that is how they are written.

In her first straight dramatic role, Sylvia Cagle as Wendy, the Ouija-board psychic, provides a much-needed and essential center of wisdom and gravity.

Catherine Tyson-Osif's Lizzie, with Irish brogue, sarcastic witticism and a missing cat, became one of the more interesting characters in the show.

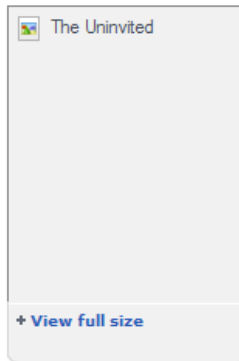
Lauren Sullivan, as Stella, gives a well-modulated performance that is properly sensitive and vulnerable.

Rounding out the cast are Tom Moore, Melinda Kman, Arthur Sullivan and Michael S. Hillegas Sr.

"The Uninvited" is one of those ghost stories that does not excuse itself with a logical ending. Much of the show has an underlying authenticity, making it surprisingly enthralling. Whatever doubts there were about the play going in, it is the acting that shines and adheres itself on the memory.

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"The Uninvited" runs through Oct. 30 at Little Theatre of Mechanicsburg, 915 S. York St., Me-



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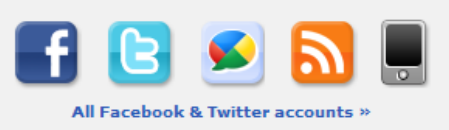
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