

Style Story

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A very Hush Hush debut

By Eszter Balázs



WHETHER the audience will learn first about women in the corporate world or sinners in purgatory is yet unclear, but Performance Lab 115 will nevertheless surprise Merlin audiences with shows never before seen on a European stage. The New York ensemble performs *A Hush Hush Hidden Thing* followed by *God's Waiting Room* on four consecutive nights at Budapest's Merlin Theater.

Getting its name from the rehearsal space of

Columbia University on 115th Street in New York, Performance Lab 115 is a collective of theater artists who are "extremely internationally-minded," said Ashlin Halfnight, the 31-year old author of the two pieces. *God's Waiting Room* debuted with tremendous success and was awarded the Overall Excellence Award for Best Play at last year's New York International Fringe Festival, just as Halfnight was leaving for Hungary on a Fulbright fellowship.

He is currently writing three pieces and is learning about the European method of theater at the National Theater and through the Performance Lab 115 productions in the Merlin.

"In *God's Waiting Room* one of the main ideas was to use a fluid time structure, with characters living in two worlds: they replay events from their lives, but in the meanwhile they stay in Purgatory," Halfnight said. The play takes the audience into a room with four Floridians and shows how they examine their beach-town life - looking at how it could have been better. The play is inspired by Mihail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, and is directed by Alexis Poledouris.

"This piece is spiritually inspiring and, in my mind, it has a positive outcome, although it doesn't say what to think. *A Hush Hush Little Thing* is less so, with more violent choices that are deemed to be permanent," Halfnight explained.

His second play written for Performance Lab 115 is debuting in Hungary, and not even the playwright, now staying in Budapest, has seen it staged.

"The play takes place in an abstract factory line which is meant to stand for the corporate culture of western business. Only women are on stage, showing how they can juggle jobs, families, pregnancies etc, while the corporate machine just keeps crunching and people get hurt." "It is a much more musical and rhythmic play than *God's Waiting Room*, and is probably much easier to understand on a visual level," Halfnight added.

Audiences can see both productions one after the other for four nights at the Merlin Theater, with the opening night already sold out.

INFORMATION

Performance Lab 115: *God's*

Waiting Room and *A Hush Hush*

Hidden Thing

Merlin Theater

7pm, March 23-26