

Four Souls Stuck in Limbo, With Dry Cleaning, AstroTurf and Beer

By [PHOEBE HOBAN](#)

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Hell hath no fury like a psychic Russian immigrant who is also a homicidally bad driver, at least according to the playwright Ashlin Halfnight. Mr. Halfnight's one-act play "God's Waiting Room" was inspired by Mikhail Bulgakov's "Master and Margarita," but this diabolical vision of purgatory is clearly all his own.



Jeff Clarke

Elena Mulroney in Ashlin Halfnight's "God's Waiting Room."

Welcome to the land of the undead, four souls stuck in limbo, condemned to replay fragments of the actions leading up to their last moments on earth. Their recursive drama takes place on a set with just a few chairs, a rectangle of AstroTurf and a clothing rack full of plastic-bagged dry cleaning. Seated on two sides of the set, the audience members serve as inadvertent props: the actors are quick to identify them as victims of the crash of a plane en route to Moscow from Paris, and to offer them a Budweiser or two.

Nobody takes advantage of the free brew, "provided by divine providence," but the fun has just begun. Despite its deliberate repetitiveness,

"God's Waiting Room" is briskly well written and highly entertaining. Each of the actors supplies intriguing shards of the shattered narrative, until it finally merges into a cohesive whole, releasing them from purgatory.

Through these often humorous re-enacted splinters, a seriously painful story emerges. There's Drummond (Jeffrey Clarke), a yuppie drug dealer married to Indira (Rebecca Lingafelter), who runs a dry cleaners. They live a nice suburban life in St. Petersburg (Florida, not Russia) replete with lawns, barbecues and stymied plans for children.

Then there's Saskia (Shelley Gershoni), the seductive marriage breaker, and finally the witchlike Bordo (the clearest nod to Bulgakov), a Russian immigrant and religious fanatic, played by Elena Mulroney, who has a sixth sense and is also the deus ex machina of the tale.

But to say any more would be to give away too much of the cleverly deconstructed plot. Go for the concise originality and the tight ensemble acting, if not for the beer.

"God's Waiting Room," a Performance Lab 115 production, will be presented four more times through Aug. 28 at P.S. 122, 150 First Avenue, at Ninth Street, (212) 279-4488.

Arts, Briefly

Compiled by [STEPHANIE GOODMAN](#)

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Theater Notes

"The Lightning Field," "God's Waiting Room" and "Go-Go Kitty, Go!" were all named best play when the FringeNYC Overall Excellence Awards were announced Sunday. Best musical went to "Silence! The Musical" and "Fleet Week: The Musical." Playwriting honors went to Katherine Knowles for "Magician," Robin Maguire for "Aquarium," Martin Casella for "The Irish Curse" and Robert Moulthrop for "Half Life." ... When the musical "Hairspray" opens at the Las Vegas Luxor in February, two Tony Award winners from the original Broadway cast will be along for the ride, Daily Variety reported on Friday. Harvey Fierstein and Dick Latessa will repeat their roles as Edna and Wilbur Turnblad. They have signed for the show's first 12 weeks, Variety said.