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Mindgame Has Got Your Crazy



Don't get too comfortable in the first act of the new thriller

By Mark Peikert

Consider it a tribute to set designer Beowulf Boritt that I spent five minutes staring at his set for *Mindgame* while ignoring the wonderful Keith Carradine. Already slightly off-kilter from the story about an insane asylum (and Carradine's ferocious performance as Dr. Farquhar), I spent far too much time examining the doctor's office on stage in an effort to convince myself that I wasn't losing my marbles, too.

Because that's the affect that Anthony Horowitz's new play will have on you. Just when you feel comfortably blasé about what's happened in the first act thanks to infamous film director Ken Russell's sneaky direction, Horowitz, Boritt and Russell all conspire to pull the rug out from under you in the second act.

In an effort to preserve the twists and turns of *Mindgame*, I'll try to be necessarily vague. True crime novelist Mark Styler (Lee Godart) has come to an insane asylum to interview notorious serial killer Easterman as part of the research for his latest book. But nothing seems quite right. There's a distressing lack of security throughout the property, music suddenly blares from the speakers then just as quickly shuts off, Dr. Farquhar ("The 'q' is silent and the 'h' is redundant," Carradine explains) had no idea that Styler was arriving, and Nurse Plimpton (Kathleen McKenny) is wearing a hot pink wig and a drug store's sexy nurse Halloween costume. And though the first act's twist is seen a mile off, the thudding hints and plodding exposition are all brilliant red herrings on the parts of Horowitz and Russell to distract us from what's really going on.

Going toe-to-toe with Carradine, Godart is quite good in the less flashy role of the perplexed and terrified Styler, while McKenny is a hilarious delight as the tarted up nurse (though she relies a bit too much on lowering her voice an octave or two to drive a joke home). But *Mindgame* is Carradine's show all the way. Delivering cryptic dialogue in a dry voice edged with contempt, and flinging his lanky frame around the stage with abandon, Carradine makes even the most sudden of shifts in tone seem perfectly natural. And that he somehow manages to not be completely upstaged by that tricky set is a testament to his charisma and potent talent.

Playwright Horowitz, meanwhile, deserves a great deal of credit for writing a play that never professes to be anything more than a particularly puzzling romp, without saddling his characters with painful philosophical ponderings. And the barbed exchanges that Farquhar and Styler spend the entire show exchanging give Carradine and Godart the rare chance to spit out the kind of witty dialogue so rarely seen on the New York stage these days, which both do with relish. At just over two hours, *Mindgame* is a delicious striptease of a show that wisely never quite goes all the way.

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