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REVIEW: RIVERSIDE THEATRE'S 'UNDERNEATH THE LINTEL'

February 2, 2015 / drama, plays, Riverside Theatre / Comments are off



Jim Van Valen in 'Underneath the Lintel' at Riverside Theatre.

By PAM HARBAUGH

VERO BEACH — Despite its slow beginning, an undercurrent of intrigue pulls you to stay with Glen Berger's unusual one-person play on the boards now in Riverside Theatre's second stage. For just as you fear it might be languishing, you realize you have taken the bait and are thoroughly hooked with "Underneath the Lintel."

It begins rather apologetically. As you take your seats, a man straightens up an unceremonious setting evoking a theater's backstage or, even less dramatic, its loading platform. He vacuums, arranges items on a table, then exits. The house lights dim and he returns to speak directly to us. He is The Librarian who has come to lecture about something important — "An Impressive Presentation of Lovely Evidences."

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He wears about his neck a library's old fashioned date stamp. It has on it all the "trials and joys of history," he says; and he only has so much time "to prove one life and justify another." We get a feeling that he'll be leaving soon.

He introduces a box of scraps which contains a mystery that could prove the existence of the legendary "Wandering Jew," who refused succor to Christ on his way to Golgotha.

The man, in turn, was condemned to wander the Earth until the Second Coming. The Librarian says proving this man's existence will prove the existence of God and make all our lives worth something.

Each scrap of evidence The Librarian reveals tightens the play's story and we eventually ask is this an obsession or a mystery? The Librarian (portrayed elegantly and with restrained angst by Jim Van Valen) could, himself, be the Wandering Jew. At the outset, The Librarian seems an other worldly character, a cypher also "cursed" to wander the world. Like the legendary character, The Librarian denied love because of fear, resulting in losing life as he knew it.

The production values here are subtle, advance theme with soft but strong, singular artistic voice and let Mr. Berger's work breathe. Allen D. Cornell is at his directorial best in these deeper dramas, peeling back layer after layer of a playwright's work until he discovers its inherent resonance. Lighting designer Rebecca Montero's work slyly pulsates. Further advancing theme is sound designer Josh Schacht, who waits for the right moment to envelope us, giving us chills.

The play's fascinating labyrinth of clues folds in historical facts and existential musings resulting in a unique theater experience. Riverside Theatre's "Underneath the Lintel" is a thoughtful, philosophical production with resonating themes that will get you thinking.

SIDE O' GRITS: "Underneath the Lintel" runs through Sunday at Riverside Theatre, 3250 Riverside Park, Vero Beach. Curtain is 8 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and 2 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. Tickets are \$40. Call 772-231-6990 or visit www.RiversideTheatre.com.



Jim Van Valen in 'Underneath the Lintel' at Riverside Theatre.

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