

# 'Hit-Story' forces audience to look at theater in new ways

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OnSite Theatre - which in years past has staged plays in such offbeat venues as a bowling alley, a bar, a youth hostel and an old mansion - continues to explore drama by exploring unusual dramatic spaces. This time, it heads to Sweat, a Clayton gym that specializes in boxing, for Carter Lewis' "Hit-Story."

Written specifically for OnSite and this location, "Hit-Story" opens in a narrow, mirrored room hung with heavy bags for boxing practice. As we in the audience find our places, we create what seems to be a vast crowd (in those mirrors) encircling Janet (Michelle Hand), a woman who certainly feels trapped. She's meeting her brother Derek (Jason Cannon), a VIP psychiatrist who dispenses soothing treatment to the business and political elite.

Maybe, she hopes, he can help her husband, Harry (Christopher Hickey). Previously a quiet professor at a nearby university, Harry has recently become subject to unpredictable fits of violence that he calls "the furies."

To protect himself and, especially, others, Harry has begun hiding out in an enclosed space, the gym's boxing ring. When Derek grudgingly agrees to speak with his brother-in-law, we all follow him and Janet down a long flight of stairs.

The downstairs setup closely resembles a conventional theater, with the rows of chairs lined up for the audience and the ring in place of a stage. Harry, slumped in some kind of coma, sits in the center of it, the automatic focus of our attention.

But it's not that simple. The actors aren't stationary, and consequently neither are we. Depending on where you're seated, you might turn to your left to see Janet right next to you, ashen-faced, deeply distrustful of both her brother and her husband, her glance darting from one to the other.

Maybe you turn to watch Harry's mother, Sheila (Donna Weinsting), as she hauls a load of his blood-stained laundry to the washing machine in the back of the room. Talking the whole time, flushed and full of invective, Sheila seems pretty furious herself. Derek, who continually takes calls from the clients who keep him on fat retainers, heads back up the stairs and down again. Harry's devoted student, Eloise (Katie McGee), comes down that staircase, too, hesitating at the last step and drawing our attention before she rushes in.

In other words, director Tom Martin forces us to experience the difference between the formal world of the theater - audience over here, actors over there - and our ordinary life, in which we switch perspective all the time. Looking at Derek, on and off the phone, or Janet, torn between attachments, or Sheila and Eloise, blinded by their refusal to face facts, or poor Harry, victim of forces beyond his grasp, we come to question our own perspective. Are we looking where we should look? What is it that we can't, or won't, see?

Thanks to this unusual arrangement, Martin and his first-class cast underscore Lewis' central questions, which have to do with the nature of honesty. Is everything relative? Or, in a world of shifting perspectives, do we need something solid? Maybe the time has come for something as solid as a fist to the jaw, no matter how much it hurts.

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