



# BWW Reviews: THE MARGINS Spooks at Molotov Theatre Group

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by Emma Kouguell

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1972. Toronto, Ontario. An eclectic group of men and women gather to see if they can create a fictional character - a ghost - that they will attempt to communicate with through seance. This eerie night became known as the controversial "Philip Experiment." Though critics question the experiment's results, the group said that they began to feel a presence and heard unexplained echoes and rapping sounds...

The Philip Experiment inspired Molotov Theatre Group's most recent horror production, *The Margins*. Directed by Carl Brandt Long and written by David Skeele, *The Margins* is a dark decent into a nightmare. Five paranormal investigators - who

also happen to be societal misfits - and a skeptical New York Times reporter gather at a haunted manor to create and raise a spirit as a psychic experiment. However, things don't go as planned. Emotions run high as secrets are revealed and relationships distract, and the experiment goes terribly better than the group could have ever imagined.

In line with Molotov Theatre Group's mission, *The Margins* applies the Grand Guignol, or French Theater of Horror, ideals to the story and acting. As an audience member, it may be important to have an understanding of Grand Guignol techniques to fully understand and appreciate the play. Writer David Skeele and director Carl Brandt Long capture many of the elements that go into the Grand Guignol storytelling, such as ample exposition, the manipulation of time, misanthropy, naturalism, a focus on visceral reactions, themes of death, sex, and insanity, and violent and gorey scenes. The ensemble captures the melodramatic acting required with the style, and the cast creates a world that is hauntingly close yet distant from the audience. This makes the characters hard to connect with, but it seems a purposeful tactic. As the stress and fear builds throughout the play, each character experiences disturbing emotional (and sometimes physical) turmoil. Yoni Gray (Trace) and Katie Jeffries (Helen) are particularly haunting and leave a troubling imprint in the audience's mind.

Two of the best aspects of the play are the violence and fight choreography. These elements are highly dynamic, beautifully choreographed, and rightly overwhelming. The gore is seamless and realistic, and Carl Brandt Long's full use of such a small space filled with six actors and the audience's toes is impressive as it clearly captures the chaos.

As for the set, Rachel Marie Wallace captures a haunted manor with eerie portraits, a barred window, and tattered boxes. Gregory Thomas Martin's sound design deepens the drama through metallic effects. Pete Vargo's lighting maintains Grand Guignol's "naturalism" but also compliments some of the scariest and most emotional moments. The play also has an intriguing video element. When the play begins, credits "roll" on the empty portrait above the fireplace. The leader of the experiment, Jonathan (Adam R. Adkins), also sets up a camera to record the event. While the camera allowed the audience to more easily see some elements, at times technical errors made the camera distracting, and the camera's contribution to the play as a whole is uncertain.

Overall, Molotov Theatre Group's *The Margins* presents a contemporary and spooky show. If you have an appetite for horror and Grand Guignol theatre, you will particularly enjoy this dark production.

Molotov Theatre Group's *The Margins* plays at DC Arts Center through April 26.

Running time: 65 minutes with no intermission.

Tickets can be purchased online at [www.molotovtheatre.org](http://www.molotovtheatre.org).

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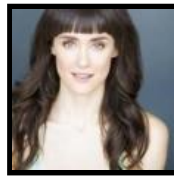
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\* Emma Kouguell is a lifelong theatergoer and arts enthusiast. She has been a part of a variety of arts projects, including blogging and scriptwriting for a local PBS arts highlight show, creating video animations for museum exhibitions, and working on independent documentaries and studio productions. Emma received her Bachelor of Arts in English and Communication at George Mason University and is currently pursuing her MFA in Film at American University, in Washington, DC.

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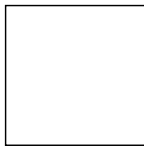
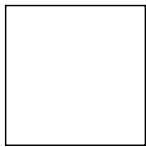
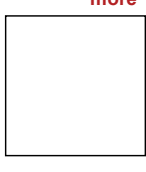
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