

January 23 - February 8, 2009

**Veronica's Room**

Reviewed February 3 by [Brad Hathaway](#)

Running time 1:45 - one intermission

◆ A Potomac Stages Pick for its jaw-dropping emotional climax  
\$14 - \$16

When "The Woman" Sherrionne Brown lets loose late in the second act of this mysterious thriller, the impact is thrilling indeed. It comes on the heels of an almost equally thrilling release by Wendy R. Couchman who plays a young woman lured into a unique dilemma. Add a truly spooky, if under-stated performance by Cal Whitehurst and you have an evening that should be experienced, not described. Indeed, it would be a crime on the order of theatricide to reveal so much as the names of the characters, let alone the nature of their demonic desires. The program lists them simply as "The Woman," "The Man," "The Girl" and "The Young Man" in order to avoid just this breach of the audience's interests. In fact, we'd recommend that you avoid even reading the director's notes or the descriptive blurb in the program until after the show. The less you know before the house lights go down and the story begins to unfold, the better.



**Storyline: An elderly couple bring a young woman and her date home to their house north of Boston, having explained that she looks so much like the daughter they lost to a tragic death that they have a special favor to ask.**

This is one of the many plays Ira Levin wrote over a long career delivering devilishly entertaining tales, often with a macabre twist or two (or three, or more). Levin, who died just over a year ago, was highly regarded in the publishing business, in Hollywood and on Broadway for his ability to structure a story no matter what the genre might be. He made it big the first time out with a teleplay called *No Time For Sergeants*, which aired in 1955 with Andy Griffith in the lead role. It was so well received that it was mounted on Broadway (Griffith was nominated for the Tony for Best Featured Actor) and then made into a movie. He was best known, however, for the psychological thrillers and horror stories *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Stepford Wives* and *The Boys from Brazil*. His lesser known [Dr. Cook's Garden](#) in which a small town doctor makes sure the good people of his town have longer lives than those people he thinks are bad, received a production by the American Century Theatre at the Gunston Arts Center last fall. *Veronica's Room* was written by Levin in the early 1970s and eked out a mere two months of a run on Broadway. But it has been produced many a time on the community and small professional theatre circuit.

Director Roy Hammond knows that it has been produced before - he says he's directed it himself three times. One of those times was at the Stage Door Theatre, a tiny house in Old Augoura, north of the San Fernando Valley in California where his production earned him the Artistic Director Achievement Award from the Valley Theatre League in 1997. He revisits the piece here, and brings a sure hand to the staging as well as an eye for setting, having designed the Victorian-era bedroom in which the action takes place.

The cast of four includes three players who are new to the company plus the Port City veteran Cal Whitehurst. We've already mentioned the fine job Brown and Couchman do. Jerry Casagrande is the third cast member making a Port City debut. He has the least involving role of the bunch but does enough with the final bizarre twist of the role that he may well be one of the conundrums you discuss on the way home from the theater. The entire production begins at a slow pace and a low energy level, raising doubts in the minds of the audience before intermission about the quality of the offering. Don't even think of leaving at intermission, however. The pace and energy level are a set up and the pay off is worth the wait.

*Written by Ira Levin. Directed by Roy Hammond. Design: Roy Hammond (set) Farrel Ann M. Hartigan (costumes) Bette Williams (hair and makeup) Amanda Helms and Central Avenue Props (properties) Dennis Giblin (lights) David Correia (sound) Douglas Olmsted (photography) John P. Allison (stage manager). Cast: Sherrionne Brown, Jerry Casagrande, Wendy R. Couchman, Cal Whitehurst.*