

# Port City Playhouse *Veronica's Room*

By **McCall Doyle** • Feb 3rd, 2009 • Category: **Reviews**

## **Veronica's Room**

### **Port City Playhouse**

Lee Center for the Performing Arts, Alexandria, VA

\$16/\$14 Seniors and Juniors

### **Playing through February 8th**

Reviewed January 30, 2009

I love Ira Levin. I've been fascinated by his unmatched macabre storytelling gifts since watching *Rosemary's Baby* when I was 15. I especially love his play, *Veronica's Room*. I'd love to tell you the plot, but I can't. Well, I can...but PCP would probably hunt me down and I'd never be heard from again!

PCP has put together a solid show. Director Roy Hammond has a special connection to Ira Levin and to this play (when you see the show, be sure to read the director's notes in your playbill) and had a clear vision for the direction the show would take. I didn't agree with all aspects of it (especially the choice to place the traditional end of Act I as the Act II opener), but it certainly made for an entertaining (and unnerving!) night at the theatre.

The four person cast worked together to create an aura of mystery and suspense. Each gets an opportunity to shine, with the occasional hit and miss. Star **Wendy R. Couchman** as The Girl is beautiful and fun, and later, appropriately terrified and distressed. In Act I, she is more genuine and sweet than her character is actually written (self-absorbed and flighty), which may be her choice or that of Mr. Hammond. In Act II, she runs the gamut of emotion very effectively-the more intense the scene, the more skillful her acting. The Young Man (**Jerry Casagrande**) has a believable Boston accent and a suitably stilted presence, but doesn't evolve as much as I would have liked to see. **Cal Whitehurst** as The Man gives a solid performance in Act I and a different than anticipated interpretation in Act II, but both work for him. **Sherrione Brown** as The Woman is superb throughout the entire show.

The Victorian bed chamber where the action takes place is elegant and eye-catching. The set design (also Hammond) is nearly flawless, except when the flimsy walls of the room are put to the test. Props (on loan from a professional company) were well thought out and added authenticity to the room. Costumes by **Farrell Ann M. Hartigan** are attractive and fitting. The lighting & sound design (**Dennis Giblin** & **David Correia**, respectively) and sound was first-class, but not always as successfully executed.

Act I is written to be overly dramatic in presentation, with the actors exaggerating to set a certain tone and set the audience on their ears with Act II. There were some admirable moments in Act I, but mostly, it was done with a more natural approach that didn't live up to the script expectations. Act II is more about deft characterizations and versatility. The actors were well suited to their challenges. The major criticism that I had was their inability to maintain essential accents in the show. Some of the actors are required to execute more than one accent, and their attempts were not successful. The poor accents actually took away from their otherwise strong performances. As a dialect coach, I am obviously sensitive to even the slightest imperfections, but the flaws were apparent enough to the average listener to be distracting.

The combat choreography is really well done, giving a realistic edge to the action. The frequent peaks in the plot are satisfying and powerful. Couchman & Brown have some truly chilling, commanding moments in Act II. Brown especially haunts with a scene near the end of the show. She manages to reach theatrical heights of ghoulish psychological euphoria that will leave you gasping in your seat.

It's hard to critique more without giving too much away, so I leave you with this: if you like a good mystery with superior acting and a bizarre twist, go out and see *Veronica's Room*.