

LOS ANGELES THEATRE REVIEWS

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Reviewed by Jeff Favre

With a theatre the size of a typical living room; an 80-minute, two-person, one-scene play; and no way to leave without disrupting the proceedings, the production had better be interesting. John W. Lowell's tight, intelligent, battle-of-wits script, set in 1931 Communist Russia, and two impressive performances turn the intimate space into an advantage, as the audience is

brought into a secret meeting.

The meeting is between the Director of the Ministry of Information (**Norman Snow**) and Anna (**Julia Fletcher**), an editor whose job is to help censor any material the government finds inappropriate. The Director offers Anna a promotion, but it's clear that his primary objective is to interrogate her about another editor copying material before censoring it and removing the copies from the ministry. An expert interrogator, the Director uses a variety of tactics to get Anna to reveal information. But Anna, while clearly intimidated, is a formidable opponent. Though the plot is simple, Lowell finds a variety of interesting ways to extend the interrogation, while slowly building toward an unexpected but believable twist. The material shines even more brightly because of Snow, who oozes evil with every breath. His forced smile masks a scowl, and his sharp, hyper movements portray a barely contained violence, as though the Director might throttle his underling. Fletcher provides a solid counter for Snow through subtleties. As Anna's confidence grows, Fletcher's walk and gestures become firmer, and her voice is stronger.

Director **Anne McNaughton** creates needed movement within the theatre's tiny confines and is unafraid to place the actors 2 feet from the audience. McNaughton uses the Director's desk as an icon of authority, and the characters' placement by the desk changes as the story shifts. The lone directorial complaint is that McNaughton opens the play with more than two minutes of silence, with only Fletcher on stage, which is dull and adds nothing to the upcoming events. But eventually the action gets rolling and the results are engrossing.