



Michael Brunk/Burien Actors Theatre
Michael Mendonsa and Devin Rodger in *The Letters*.

‘Letters’ tells a tale of mystery

By John Van de Ven
Staff Reporter

As she nervously paces back and forth in the Director’s office, Anna Borisovna pulls a cigarette from a small case she removes from her pocket. Timidly, she attempts to light it, as a look of concern is painted on her face.

All of a sudden, steps can be heard outside getting closer. The look of concern on Anna’s face deepens.

This is the foundation that *The Letters* builds the rest of its story on, a psychological thriller by playwright John W. Lowell.

The Letters is currently running until May 1 at the Burien Actors Theatre.

Set in a ministry in a 1930s Soviet Union, the play explores the paranoia and struggle to control information under the Stalinist government.

The Letters features only two actors, unfurling the story through dialog between Anna (Devin Rodger) and the Director (Michael Mendonsa), the head honcho in charge of controlling the Ministry and the many secrets imprisoned within its walls.

Lowell excels at captivating the audience by feeding into their natural distrust of the unknown. The interactions between Anna and the Director become a cat and mouse game, as the Director toys with Anna’s emotions with his cruel jokes and magisterial personality.

The set, created by Maggie Larrick, acts as a time machine, taking the audience back to 1931. A couple of pictures hang on the Director’s wall, one of Lenin and one of Stalin. Every-

thing from the rotary telephone, to the small box-shaped intercom, to the plain wooden chairs around the desk become almost ancillary characters to the story, by creating tense and slightly uncomfortable situations.

The costumes are era-appropriate, mostly drab with a hint of color that helps breathe more life into each character.

The acting is excellent and both characters were believable. Rodger plays the timid and vulnerable Borisovna, and Mendonsa is perfectly menacing, leaving no minute mannerism out.

The play was directed by veteran Beau M.K. Prichard. Prichard said the story parallels the present day world, because of how much surveillance of citizen is allowed these days in the name of national security.

Live piano and percussion music by composer Allan Loucks is played before the show starts and during the intermission. Loucks’ music matches the tone and theme of the story.

Overall the show is highly entertaining and will keep you on the edge of your seat, and the story is appropriate for teens around the age of 16 and up. There were some adult elements but nothing over the top. Definitely a must see for fans of suspenseful thrillers.

The Letters is running now through May 1 at the Burien Actors Theatre, 14501 4th Ave. S.W. in Burien, Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. at the Burien Actors Theatre. Tickets are available online at burienactorstheatre.org or by phone at 206-242-5180. General admission is \$20, seniors are \$17, and students are \$10.



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