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Step into an intense, post-truth world in Street Corner Arts' 'The...

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John W. Lowell's play "The Letters" is, in many ways, an exercise in theatrical minimalism. Taking place entirely in a plain administrative office in Stalinist Russia, with only two characters and a running time of about 75 minutes, "The Letters" shows just how much tension can be built solely through conversation. It helps, of course, that the conversation is one where the stakes are several human lives.

Street Corner Art's new production of Lowell's play, [running through April 20 at Hyde Park Theatre](#), is an extreme contrast to [their previous show, "Junk,"](#) which featured an epic scope, a huge cast and a lengthy running time. "The Letters," by comparison, is a small, contained chamber piece, anchored by two fiercely talented performers.

Clair Grasso plays Anna, an editor whose current job is to censor the private papers of Russia's greatest composer so that his "perversions" do not get out to the public. She is invited into the office of her ministry's director, played by Michael Stuart (who pulls double duty as the director of this production as well). What begins as a seemingly innocent conversation slowly transforms into, at first, a job interview, and later an all-out interrogation.

Despite never leaving the one office or adding any other performers, "The Letters" succeeds in establishing several narrative twists as the dialogue grows ever more tense, and the truth becomes murkier and murkier. Indeed, the resonance with our current day is impossible to ignore, as the play asks us to what it means when the truth is based on one man's say-so rather than on a bedrock of facts.

It takes an actress of Grasso's prodigious talent to successfully portray Anna, a character who must evince outward timidity while maintaining an inner reservoir of deep strength. Stuart, meanwhile, is equally amorphous, shifting between charming, cajoling and outright threatening Anna in order to bend her to his will. Stuart wisely takes advantage of the two performers' tremendous height differential to make their power imbalance physical, taking what could otherwise be almost a radio play and turning it into a taut battle of wills that relies as much on the actors' postures as it does their vocal inflections.

Despite its small size and scope, Street Corner Arts' "The Letters" packs in a great deal of suspense and tension in a slow-building, riveting drama that considers what a "post-truth" reality might actually look like.