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The Quill

Working It Out

You're sitting in your seat, program in hand, waiting with pleasant expectation for the play to start. The stage is set – three actors are sitting at their desks, fiddling with their hair or with wind-up teeth. And then the lights go out.

Three men, sitting in the corner of the room, stand up. The first pulls out a gun, while the second yanks a sack over the third's head. "Get the [hell] out of the theatre!" the first yells to the third. And the men move to the center of the room, where a new spotlight has descended. After a few minutes of shouting, a telephone phone rings, and the lights go out again.

Lights are back, now illuminating the main stage, where the actors have sat for the last ten minutes. A casual conversation is struck up about baby showers and the recent layoffs. They are freelance proofreaders, working outside of the corporate structure, but they're about to be faced with a hard decision: join the company or be fired.

This is "Working it Out," a play about life in the workplace that's showing at Centerstage theatre. The show itself consist of excerpts from three different plays, "Jerry and Tom," by one of the screenwriters for the show "Mad Men", "Washed up on the Potomac," by Lynn Rosen, and "Hidden in This Picture" by Aaron Sorkin, the screenwriter and playwright who created TV's "West Wing."

The plays center on the relationship between one's work and one's identity. In "Tom and Jerry," two hit-men struggle to define the line between their violent work lives and who they are at home and with friends. "Washed up on the Potomac" revolves around three freelancers and the threat of loosing a job. "Hidden in This Picture," has a hilarious set-up, with a movie director frantically trying to perfect the final shot of his movie.

All three excerpts are highly entertaining. The action is exhilarating, with witty dialogue and concrete performances by all the actors.

However, while each excerpt is in its own way wry, engaging, and even, at times poignant, the line connecting the three is too tenuous. Despite the smooth transitions between excerpts, the solid performances, and the stage design, the audience is left without conclusion or any sense of finality. The basic framework of the production is too choppy, and the pieces don't stand as well together as they would alone. Watching "Working it Out" ends up feeling like sampling morsels of food when what you really want is full meal.