

Imagination soars in ETC one-acts

By Joseph McDonough

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"Nothing dies that is remembered."

This line spoken in *Whisperings* applies to both imaginative one-act plays performed together this weekend at Ensemble Theatre as part of its Off-Center — On-Stage Series.

In *Skirmishes* by Elizabeth Logan Harris, a contemporary woman (a fine Kristin Burkhead) meets the ghosts of her ancestors. This Sinclair Family Hysterical Society consists of Sinclair women who have not connected with the circumstances in which they lived.

Ms. Harris creates a vivid non-linear piece that includes inter-related stories from different generations, magic tricks, short monologues, and percussion accompaniment (by Matt Wind). Somehow it all seems to blend nicely, except for a quick final scene that seems unnecessary.

Gyllian Raby's energetic and specific direction keeps the action

moving and focused. She gets solid work out of her cast, including Ms. Harris as the ghost Meta, whose forgotten life and mysterious death are uncovered during the play.

Sara Michelle Smith, who was a standout earlier this season in *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, is a delight as the spunky ghost Sugar. Naomi Bailis and Mardi Kring Perry work well as the most distant spirits from the Sinclair past. Chuck Haungs and Taren Frazier are not as effective in largely unsympathetic roles as the men in the lives of the Sinclair women.

The second half of the evening is *Whisperings*, written and performed by Boo Friedmann. This play is also an abstract piece, this time focusing on remembrances of and reflections on the Holocaust.

Ms. Friedmann is unflinching as an author and performer. The play begins with a stand-up comedy routine on growing up Jewish in America. She then moves on to

horrific tales from the concentration camps and beyond. She skillfully bridges the two moods into a cohesive piece of theater.

She slips into a variety of roles such as an elderly Holocaust survivor, a 9-year-old boy, and even a sort of other-worldly nursemaid to an infant Adolph Hitler. The excruciatingly realistic scene in which she portrays a woman talking to God while dying in the gas chamber is unforgettable.

Ms. Friedmann's performance is stunning and is aided by the moving direction of Michael Burnham. The play also contains a dance ensemble (choreographed by Ms. Friedmann) that beautifully evokes the human anguish of the piece.

Whisperings is the most compelling of the three plays presented in this series so far.

Skirmishes and Whisperings through Sunday, Ensemble Theatre, \$10. 421-3555.