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# Quasimondo Restages Theatre X's 'Strangers' for a New Medium

BY HARRY CHERKINIAN MAY 21, 2020 10:09 A.M.

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“Too much information is the problem,” says one character staring into the TV camera, speaking to a live-streaming audience. Perfect words for 2020. But they were actually written over 40 years ago in the play *An Interest in Strangers* when television was *the* dominant medium and *the* main source of news.

Composed by Milwaukee’s John Schneider for Theatre X, *An Interest in Strangers* debuted in Amsterdam in 1979. *Strangers* was recently revived online by Quasimondo in the first of its THREADS ensemble-based virtual play reading series.

Director (and /Narrator/Cameraman) Jeffrey Mosser has assembled a solid cast for this 90-minute reading (intermission at the viewer’s discretion). *Strangers* extends the 1960s slogan, “the medium is the message” to ask just how exactly does the medium and the messages affect the way people live?

With a very visually-oriented script filled with numerous monologues, the challenge for the audience is to visualize the stage directions being read out loud while staring back into our own mobile devices. Stripped to its bare-bones language, *Strangers* is even more timely and relevant after all these years, given updated cultural markers: climate change, terrorism, clean drinking water, “He Whose Name We Dare Not Speak.” (It eventually got blurted out). And the fresh references fit in seamlessly given the ensemble-based, improvisational nature of the writing.

The audience participation sections were especially fascinating to watch onscreen (and add to) as surveys were provided online during the production and questions were asked where audiences could answer via Zoom Chat with a

“yes” or “no.” The responses were added into the performance, providing specific demographic information about the audience; fun and factual in real time.

Kudos to the ensemble who had some incredibly long and emotional monologues, with an innate understanding how to build the momentum. Virtual performances provide an extremely up close, intimate (read: vulnerable) portrayal, rarely available with live stage productions. As Michael, a news anchor messing up his script, Kirk Thomsen held our attention with his wild-eyed outbursts yet balanced emotional exposure. Jenni Reinke’s Lilly made full use of literal space, proving that an actor can fill any screen—up, down, sideways.

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*An Interest In Strangers* is an all too timely reminder that words written years ago can now be disseminated through a new medium, but can have an unintended, if prophetic, meaning.

“I don’t think that it’s dying that’s the problem,” says the same actor, staring into the TV camera. “It’s living in an unfamiliar way.” Words that eerily resonate in this Age of

Pandemic where now, “dying *and* living in an unfamiliar way” are, sadly, today’s reality.

To learn more about Quasimondo’s free, ongoing THREADS series, 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. Visit: [www.Quasimondo.org](http://www.Quasimondo.org). Upcoming virtual content can be found at [Quasimondo.org/QTV](http://Quasimondo.org/QTV).

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Harry Cherkinian is an award-winning writer and reviewer in the arts and entertainment field, specializing in music and theater.

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