

PSST! – OFF-LEASH AREA – JUNE 22ND 2013

Posted on [July 8, 2013](#) by [From the Back Row](#)

So, clearly I'm a bit late on this post, as the show closed two weeks ago. But, since I kept bringing it up in conversation, and I keep thinking about it, I found it an obligation to do a write-up of the show. Here goes... Going into *Psst!* I had little knowledge of Off-Leash Area, but I did do a little research about the show and its previous presentation in 2005. A show with masks. That's cool. However, I was entirely unprepared for what I was about to experience.



No words. Not only on stage but also from my mouth after having witnessed whatever it was I had just experienced. Describing the beauty and simplicity of this show is difficult, but I will try to the best of my ability with my feeble grasp of the English language. At its core, *Psst!* is a love story—a most beautiful and authentic narrative about the most basic human emotions of love and loss. Boy meets girl (creators Paul Herwig and Jennifer Ilse respectively); there's a villain, in this case Death (Jim Lieberthal). But aesthetically and artistically, it transcends any cliché that could possibly be thrown at it.

To start, every actor is masked. *Psst!* is based on the graphic novels of [JASON](#), whose universal, black/white style is similarly voiceless. I don't know what crazy mind initially thought that this show was possible, marketable, or even worth the effort, but I am so glad they did. *Psst!* is a masterpiece of performance, art, and design—a dazzling display of drama and acting when words are not enough to convey the human condition.

Obviously a show with no spoken words relies heavily on sound design and score, and Marc Doty creates a sonic tableau that weaves together with the images on stage so seamlessly that one doesn't think of the sound as a separate element from the visuals, but together as a unified whole. His gritty, industrial score, reminiscent of those of Clint Mansell (*Requiem for a Dream*, *The Fountain*) with hints of Nine Inch Nails and Radiohead, juxtaposed with 20s era samples, cleverly saturate the stage in a way I've never seen a composer accompany a live performance. That type of spot-on execution generally only comes in the movies, as sound design is often an afterthought for a stage show. It was clear that from its inception music was just as important to this play's success as action.

And what acting! One does not realize how important the face is in the art of acting until one removes the ability to utilize facial expression and vocal inflection. Every member of the ensemble successfully creates distinct characters and emotions solely through body language, with a dancer's fluidity and a mime's penchant for exaggeration. There was no weak link.

Psst! dances a fine line between abstraction and intelligibility, but the result is pure art. Dance, music, and narrative combine to create a mesmerizing example of what can happen when one throws out the rulebook and says, "fuck it, I'm going to make something amazing and you can either get out of my way or come along for the ride."

Every piece of set, prop, and costume were meticulous in their simplicity. There was no wasted time nor space, sound nor action. PVC tubing, Styrofoam, a little wood, and paper were all Off-Leash Area needed to frame this remarkable display of artistry. And, it all served the overall aesthetic that Paul Hedwig and Jennifer Ilse created. Every inch of stage was their singular, cohesive vision.

There is no doubt, that wherever I am, I will get to the next Off-Leash Area production.

[5 out of 5 – this was a flawlessly executed production of a flawless concept]

Find more information about their garage tour: <http://www.offleasharea.org/>