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Freelance writer

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Theater: *Close Up Space* Wastes Talented David Hyde Pierce

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CLOSE UP SPACE * out of ****
NY CITY CENTER

The opening scene of Molly Smith Metzler's comedic play *Close Up Space* is the only good scene. But in fairness it does briskly and efficiently introduce our main character, his perspective on the world and his troubles in this new production by **Manhattan Theatre Club**.

The marvelous actor David Hyde Pierce is Paul, an editor at a boutique publishing house and he's lecturing us on editing by using plaintive emails from various heads of boarding schools as samples to dissect. Pierce deftly reduces these desperate pleas to come pick up his rebellious daughter (who is wandering campus naked and pulling off this or that unfortunate shenanigan) by red-lining them and eliminating the redundancies, poor grammar and rambling tone. It's funny, tight and delivers a lot of information.

From this opening, we learn Paul is an old school publishing editor (though in the slow-to-adapt world of publishing, his use of an overhead projector might seem daringly modern). He's precise and dedicated to his work. He doesn't suffer fools gladly. And his daughter is either troubled or a free spirit but definitely a handful.

Even this scene misses a joke. When the new intern he's lecturing tries to talk about the software she can use, Pierce says it certainly didn't help her write a coherent cover letter and shows the editing *it* needed, a nice visual gag. We immediately wonder why she got the job (out of 140 applicants)? If she'd asked, Pierce might have whipped out letters even more heavily red-lined or perhaps a pile of shredded documents and said, "This was the competition." It hardly matters, given the confused nature of everything that follows.

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The intern Bailey (Jessica DiGiovanni) makes no sense on any level. She can't speak intelligently, immediately starts pining for the chips and soda available at some other publishing house and blathers on to the house's top writer during a meeting when she was told to remain quiet. (Bailey compliments the writer on her choice of font, when Bailey was just told the writer uses an antique typewriter, leading us to believe Bailey is a complete idiot.) Ultimately her character is so superfluous that at one point she is simply sent home for the day and never heard from again.

Even more tiresome is the "wacky" receptionist Steve (Michael Chernus) who is literally camping out in the office because his dog has shown affection for Steve's roommate. This goof somebody's relative or friend; he needs a job and is somehow forced on Paul. Steve makes nutty jokes and isn't remotely believable on any level but at least he's an identifiable cliché (the oddball life-force). Rosie Perez brings her considerable charms and distinctive voice to Vanessa Finn Adams, a high maintenance best-selling author. She's both terribly demanding and a sweetheart who has a thing for Paul. Adams is both street savvy and high falutin', sassy and Shakespeare-quotin' at the same time.

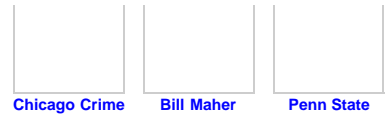
But not even she can challenge Paul's teenage daughter for sheer unlikeliness. Harper (Colby Minifie) is an 18 year old teen who shouts out Russian at the top of her voice for endless stretches of the show because her mother committed suicide, Paul sent her away to boarding school and she feels exiled. Hence the Russian, which she speaks so fluently that Harper translates poems into English during her spare time. It's an idea so heavy-handed and a conceit so labored in its whimsy that Wes Anderson would avoid it.

This child terrorizes Paul, brings in a crack team of anarchists to strip his office completely of every item and refuses to speak English for far longer than you would imagine. Oddly, Minifie is far more passionate and believable when shouting out Russian. When she (finally) speaks in English, Minifie adapts an exceptionally deliberate, odd cadence; perhaps she's trying to make sense of the story.

The even odder touch is that the fine office set by Todd Rosenthal slides off stage after Harper had the room stripped by her unseen associates. But it remains in the wings, a lurking presence. One assumes it will slide back into place at some point -- else why have it there in plain sight? But in fact it too has been banished and without even the decency of a divider or wall or even a curtain to shield the now abandoned set from our view. We literally stare at it just out of the actors' reach for the rest of the play, a scenic choice one struggles to understand.

I wouldn't judge anyone's acting in a play like this so I'll pass over most of the cast in silence. Rosie Perez and David Hyde Pierce have a fun chemistry at moments; they're an unlikely couple it's fun to see together, however brief and confused their scenes may be. Pierce actually holds the show together in a way with his considerable skill, though by the end he is jumping around to try and shake some life into this mess. Even the finale is misjudged, wasting a modest visual flourish by slamming home the obvious fact that Paul and Harper will come closer together.

The poster makes no sense, by the way. They've used an editing notation that indicates the space between the first two words in the title *Close Up Space* should be eliminated; according to the markings, they should be one word. But no. "Close up" can be two words. Close-up can be hyphenated. But "closeup" is nonsense. They should have placed the notation below the title and placed it *between the picture of Paul and Harper*, indicating that the emotional space between *them* should be "closed up" and they should rediscover their love, not the space between the two words which is right and proper. They even get the editing wrong.



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Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of *Showbiz Sandbox*, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's [available](#) for free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his [website](#) and his [daily blog](#). Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called *Popsurfing* and also

available for free on iTunes. Link to him on Netflix and gain access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

Note: Michael Giltz was provided with free tickets to this show with the understanding that he would be writing a review.

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HUFFPOST COMMUNITY MODERATOR

skylover

I want my country forward!

1722 Fans

12:15 PM on 12/21/2011

Speaking of getting the editing wrong: you really need an editor, Michael!

There are far too many grammatical errors in your review.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz

freelance writer

127 Fans

01:38 AM on 12/23/2011

You're quite right and thanks for the heads-up. No editors here. It can all be blamed on me. Normally I post and then read it over again to catch errors. It's easier to edit when reading the final format rather than the backroom format we deal with. But with family visiting I was pressed and rushed. Plus I must confess it's no fun to write a pan when you're not mean-spirited. It's hard to expend energy on something that everyone involves already knows doesn't work. I've tightened it a little and caught the incorrect spelling of write/right. So thanks.

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tttom

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09:58 PM on 12/20/2011

When you have two world class actors in your production (Mr.Hyde-Pierce and Ms.Perez) you should take the trouble for coherent set design. That's all I can say about this.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz

freelance writer

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01:38 AM on 12/23/2011

Agreed!

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