

Fringe Free-for-All Cleans Up Its Act

ROBERT SIMONSON

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For those of you who are intent on meaning, however, you might want to try “A Small Hole,” a would-be literary head trip by playwright Julia Jarcho and the collaborative outfit Performance Lab 115. Lab is a good term for this group, because this marriage of Jane Austen and the Marquis de Sade smacks of a grand, avant-garde experiment its creators hoped might result in a potent dramatic potion. Jarcho dissected Austen’s least popular work, “Mansfield Park,” and inserted bits of Marquis de Sade’s play “Justine” to be performed in an amateur theatrical. The quintet of characters don and doff, in lightening exchanges, English country manners and sadistic behavior. The language is artful and oblique, and the acting at a high level from this mercurial and appealing cast. Still, it’s doubtful that the text’s deeper meanings will be extracted by anyone beyond Ms. Jarcho and some Austen scholars.

That said, the Fringe could use additional works like “A Small Hole” — plays that attempt to be more than amusing, attention-getting, or potentially commercial. Opaque as it is, “A Small Hole” is an artistic endeavor. Most Fringe shows are content to merely take part in the festival; “A Small Hole” means to further the theater in the larger sense. The former is a merry choice, but in the end an empty one.