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## People Lost in Transit, Strangeness Abounding 'Nomads' at the Incubator Arts Project

By **CLAUDIA LA ROCCO** JUNE 3, 2014



**Nomads** Kate Benson, left, and Rebecca Lingafelter, performing at the Incubator Arts Project. Credit Yi Zhao

The playwright Julia Jarcho and the director Alice Reagan share a fondness for strangeness, for edges that don't quite line up.

And both artists are evidently inspired by smart American women of letters, maybe especially those who have not always been adequately celebrated, whose edges are also a bit jagged: Susan Glaspell, for example, whose 1921 play "The Verge" Ms. Reagan directed in 2009. Or the modern writer Jane Bowles, whose life in part forms the basis for Ms. Jarcho's "Nomads," which Ms. Reagan is directing at the Incubator Arts Project.

Rebecca Lingafelter portrayed the complicated heroine in “The Verge,” and now she has her hands full with Jean, a sharp-witted, nervous writer with a husband named Dudley (Ben Williams), a taste for women (and alcohol) and a serious case of writer’s block. Dudley helps her ship overseas for a jungle sojourn, partly to get her writing again and partly to get her away from Connie (Jenny Seastone Stern), who seems as unmoored as Jean, only rather more predatory.

Rounding out the cast is Jean’s theatrical friend Joan (Kate Benson), whose attempts to feel something (anything) get her tangled with a cabdriver (Mr. Williams, doing marvelously nimble double duty; Ms. Seastone Stern has a harder task as a creaturelike magnate swathed in dark cloth who ushers Jean into her new environs). The cabby eventually leads Joan to Connie, and trouble. Or maybe salvation. Or maybe both — or neither.

Plot resolution isn’t Ms. Jarcho’s thing. And that’s great — too many playwrights are too fixated on tidying up tiny rooms. But “Nomads” often has the feeling of strangeness for its own sake. Her 2013 play, “Grimly Handsome,” was similarly elusive but a lot less labored.

Juxtapositions of performance styles (now overtly mannered and conventional, now more knowingly contemporary) feel similarly nonproductive, as though the production were itself at loose ends — like Joan, bored and uneasy at a party, unsure of how to truly be present, or what crowd to locate herself in.

Ms. Jarcho is a smart and sensitive writer, and there are terrific passages here, especially some of the more menacingly humorous lines given to the enigmatic cabdriver. His vehicle becomes an ideal vehicle for the production’s preoccupations with lost travelers, people forever in between destinations.

Here, the threat is satisfyingly directionless, as it rarely is elsewhere in the play. As the Bowles quote in the program reads: “I fear nomads. I am afraid of them and afraid for them too.”

“Nomads” runs through June 15 at the Incubator Arts Project, 131 East 10th Street; 866-811-4111, [incubatorarts.org](http://incubatorarts.org)

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