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STAGE

## Disturbing Spectacles

It's pretty much the end of the world in 'Don't Look Now'

~ By DON SHIRLEY ~

Topsy-turvy world: Don't Look Now

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any theatergoers – my mother, for example – want plays that are pleasant pick-me-ups. If that's you, don't do as I did last Saturday.

I ventured to the Unknown Theater's Don't Look Now for the 8 p.m. show...more or less, about the end of the world.

The Unknown Theater certainly lives up to its name with Don't Look Now. Written by the American poet Kenneth Patchen in 1958, it has reportedly been produced only a couple of times, in obscure circumstances. Judging from Unknown artistic director Chris Covics's staging, it deserves much more attention.

As the play begins, the world has suddenly gone topsy-turvy. The middle-aged Worthcrofts, their adult daughter and her boyfriend, and a trio of '50s bohemians are shocked to find themselves standing on the ceiling of the Worthcroft living room. Most of the set pieces hang like stalactites from the top of the stage, but the ceiling lighting fixture rises from below like a stalagmite.

If this isn't upsetting enough, the group soon realizes that when they stand near the upside-down walls, their words can't be heard – and that this zone of inaudibility is likely to creep closer to the center of the room.

Their reactions range from panic to intrigued curiosity. But more important than anything the characters say or do is the overall mood. A three-man jazz group performs from the sidelines, and the music helps elevate Patchen's quirky wordplay into a haunting vision of humanity huddled together before the end.

Patchen suffered from debilitating illness during much of his adult life, and this play was written during a momentary respite. But the piece also evokes the late-'50s fear of the bomb – a fear that nowadays seems freshly minted. And the gibberish of the '50s absurdist, especially Ionesco, seems influential here. It's all very cool, man – a vivid evocation of the Beat era nearly five decades later.



*Don't Look Now, Unknown Theater, Hollywood, (323) 466-7781. Closes Dec. 17. Info: UnknownTheater.com.*