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Local Theatre Review

The stories we have yet to hear - Little Wars

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"Every word she writes is a lie, including 'and' and 'the'."
Mary McCarthy, 1979

Inspired by the infamous feud with fellow writer Mary McCarthy, Steven Carl McCasland's *Little Wars* is an exploration of the untold stories of Lillian Hellman, and other influential female voices during the war.

Gather Hellman, Gertrude Stein and her Alice, Dorothy Parker, Agatha Christie, and Muriel Gardiner in a room, and the results are bound to be delectable. McCasland's script is linguistic candy. He has captured the flavor of these writers stylings, and sprinkles in his own pacing for a lush product.



The Brumder Mansion at 3046 W Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee 53208

The Brumder Mansion is a cozy venue for the Milwaukee Entertainment Group. Upon arriving at the bed and breakfast, you step off the streets of Milwaukee and into absolute luxury. The furniture and decor evoke a nostalgia for a time long past. To access the theatre, then, you take a snug winding staircase deep into the belly of the building. At the end of the path, a single door opens into a lively parlor. It feels as if you've left reality entirely.

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Photos courtesy of the Milwaukee Entertainment Group. The cast of *Little Wars*.

Patrons immediately face a set which has been exquisitely draped with hundreds of books and adorned with eclectic art. Amanda J. Hull's scenic design is an accurate artist's home, thoroughly lived in yet cared for. The small room seems to burst at the seams, beautiful and yet entirely suffocating to those within. In other words, it feels exactly how France would in 1940.

As fascinating of a spark that McCarthy quote may be, this play is not about McCarthy, but rather examining the circumstances that form our ideologies. How does Hellman become a nemesis to McCarthy? Does she really write Muriel Gardiner into her book *Pentimento*? How exactly do famous writers make a difference during the grand scheme of war?

What can one woman do?

This ensemble cast is comprised of some of the strongest actresses in the Milwaukee theatre scene. Nobody outshines one another. Instead, they each continually rise and meet each other at their most vulnerable. With topics ranging from light musings to heavy trauma, there is not a moment to take a breath - *Little Wars* will sweep you away.

Little Wars is no small feat. The dialogue is tight, and addresses what is perhaps the darkest era of human history. It is not heavy handed or burdensome; alternatively, the bizarre set of characters bring the vitality of the human spirit. Director Bryce Lord navigates this distinction with an experienced hand. This is a story of empowerment in the face of oppression, and love in the wake of hatred. Even during World War II, the most meaningful victories are the little wars we fight and win within ourselves every day.

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