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# BWW Special Feature: 99 and Under the Radar, A Look at Indie Theatre's Movers and Shakers

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Friday, December 4, 2009; Posted: 12:12 PM - by Michael Roderick

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**Welcome to 99 AND UNDER THE RADAR: A LOOK AT INDIE THEATRE'S MOVERS AND SHAKERS, BroadwayWorld's new weekly series that showcases standout productions and production companies from the independent theater scene in New York City. Each week, independent producer Michael Roderick will be discussing the latest goings on in the theatrical wings, highlighting those with potentially bright futures.**

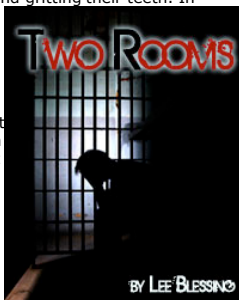
This Week's Topic: New Company gets "Active"

Often new Independent Theatre companies take some time to create a product that is worth talking about. The company muddles about for a year or two, producing shows that are pretty good, and then they produce something that really gets people's attention. In very rare cases a company has a premier show that is worth talking about and its mark is left on the industry.

The Active Theater Company's current production of Two Rooms by Lee Blessing might as well be a branding iron. The company's mission reads: "The Active Theatre Company consists of a group of artists dedicated to the work, both new and old, that moves us. Moves us to think and rethink, to laugh, to love, to cry, to question. Moves us to anger. Moves us to action. Moves us to feel more than we are comfortable feeling." The group has certainly taken on that sentiment with this production. Two Rooms, about a woman

whose husband is held hostage by a terrorist group, had the audience laughing, gasping, and gritting their teeth. In addition to being emotionally gripping, this show was also very wellproduced.

This is a company that clearly knows how to assemble a team and starts with a solid cast including Andy Kelso, Jason Emanuel, Raissa Dorf, and Angelica-Lee Aspiras who all handle Blessing's poetic language in a way that makes it instantly accessible. The inspired performances are also a result of Gloria Bowen's deft direction and attention to detail as well as music expertly designed by Jacob Subotnick. The songs are so carefully chosen that one could argue that the pre-show music and moments are strong enough to be their own separate production. Add to this a set design by D. Craig M. Napoliello that is simplistic yet accommodating to the superb projection designs of David Ojalla, and one can see how this show could easily work just as well at a place like The Public or Roundabout. In fact, the overall professionalism of the presentation of the work harkens back to the days when The Culture Project was on 45 Bleeker and shows there moved to Broadway. For a company that fills the role of the "new kid" on the Indie Theatre scene, this group may move to the head of the class very quickly. So why go and see their inaugural production? More importantly, why are they ones to watch?



Any team that can take a subject this controversial and provide such humanity deserves applause. Far too often plays that deal with hostage situations become preachy and over the top and after the President's recent decisions on war and where our troops are heading next, it's nIce To see a show that forces the audience to be the judge rather than be told what to think. This show is raw and human and this company has produced something that forces the audience to also be vulnerable. It's clear that they have an understanding of the craft and that they are making careful choices about producing work that gets an audience talking. It is very likely they will continue to spark conversations and cultural dialogue which is something that needs to happen more often. If there's interest in being a part of the conversation, you can get your tickets [here](#).

It's always good to see a group out there that promotes the fact that theatre can ignite cultural discourse and it's high time for a fresh new "Active" group with a serious voice. All that's left is for us to listen.

Read more of Michael's insights at [www.oneproducerinthecity.typepad.com](http://www.oneproducerinthecity.typepad.com).

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Michael Roderick has produced at Manhattan Theatre Source, Theater Row Studios, Where Eagles Dare, the Dorothy Strelsin Theatre, the Red Room, the Bridge Theatre at Shetler Studios and has produced shows in the NY International Fringe Festival, the Midtown International Theatre Festival, the Samuel French Off-Off Broadway Short Play Festival, among others. He has worked as an office associate for Davenport Theatrical Enterprises and has Off Broadway producing credit as an Associate Producer of the musical ROOMS a Rock Romance at New World Stages as well as an Associate Producer of The New Hopeville Comics at The Chernuchin Theater at ATA. Michael is currently the program director for Self-Producing Artists at Theater Resources Unlimited. Michael is also a graduate of the Commercial Theatre Institute's 14-week Program as well as the Six-week Creative Intensive Program. Michael is the organizer of the Independent Producers Alliance of NY and he holds a BA in Secondary Ed English and Theatre Performance from Rhode Island College as well as a Masters in Educational Theatre for Colleges and Communities from NYU.

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