

# No Place for a Woman review at Theatre 503, London – ‘subtle and compelling’



*Emma Paetz in No Place for a Woman at theatre503, London. Photo: Jack Sain*

by [Dave Fagnoli](#) - May 9, 2017

Both intricate and understated, *No Place for a Woman* is a subtle and compelling character piece set during the closing days of the Second World War.

In her second play for Small Things Theatre, writer Cordelia O’Neill shows impressive economy, her sparse, intercutting dialogue presenting two sides of the same grim story.

Emma Paetz shows a steely edge as Isabella, a skilled ballerina snatched from a concentration camp to perform at a party for Nazi officers. Opposite her, Ruth Gemmell is softly shattering as Annie,

the desperately isolated wife of camp commandant Frederick, her icy, aristocratic poise gradually slipping away along with her monstrous husband's attention.

Half visible behind a gauze screen, cellist Elliot Rennie performs his muscular, sometimes jagged score, adding unsettling texture with scrapes and percussive bow-striking.

While his fine, expressive playing is a powerful emotional spur, it is never as fully integrated into the production as it might be.

Director Kate Budgen zeroes in on small, almost subliminal details. Annie twists her wedding ring painfully when she mentions Frederick. Isabella's hands are always held at precise angles, as though mid-dance.

Sarah Readman's lighting is every bit as unassuming, casting the production in heavy, sombre shadow, drawing us between scenes with ominous slow fades. A line of brilliant white light cuts the space in half, delineating the two character's very different forms of captivity. As that line is repeatedly crossed, and both women's lives become entangled, the simple story builds to a clever and satisfying conclusion.

## Verdict

Fine music and persuasive performances lend emotional force to this restrained wartime drama

