



Carol Rosegg

**THE INTERNATIONALIST** When disaster strikes at the overseas office that is the setting of Anne Washburn's play "The Internationalist," the employees start chattering away at a frantic clip. Even the most sophisticated globe-trotters in the audience will have no idea what they're saying, because in this suspenseful tale of an American abroad, the foreigners speak a wholly invented language. "Yab habbin hama aga lanali pana dad" is a typical statement. Among the impressive feats in this play — a thriller about miscommunication and American exceptionalism that bounces back and forth between the perspective of the United States businessman Lowell (Zak Orth) and his love interest, Sara (Annie Parisse), both shown above — is how this gibberish never sounds remotely silly. It's even a bit menacing. In the script Ms. Washburn, a nimble writer whose range includes ghost stories ("Apparition") and politi-

cal portraits ("The Ladies"), calls her play an "elusive comedy." The tickets are surely worth it for this scene alone, which includes hardly an English word. While it's never clear what exactly the panic is about — clearly, files are missing, and a great deal of money is at stake — there is a remarkable clarity in the moment-by-moment action, which provides its own narrative. At moments the cast, which includes Liam Craig, Gibson Frazier, Nina Hellman and Ken Marks, reminds you of the way silent film stars communicate a story or, even, of the finely orchestrated chaos in Michael Frayn's "Noises Off." And the longer the scene unfolds, the more you sympathize with the plight of the American businessman, constantly on the move, struggling unsuccessfully to understand and confident of his ability to do so. (At the Vineyard Theater, 108 East 15th Street, Flatiron district, 212-353-0303)

JASON ZINOMAN