

THEATRE REVIEWS

The Stronger and The Maids

Produced by Anne Howard and Kate Waring with producing director Daniel Hutchison, artistic director Jack Stehlin and managing director Jeannine Welles at the Hudson Theatre, 6543 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood; (213) 660-TKTS. Opened Nov. 30; plays Fri.-Sat., 8; closes Jan. 20.

The Hudson Guild consistently presents challenging, quality productions in their Hollywood Theatre Row venue, and their latest offering is no exception. Despite a need for clarification at times by their respective directors, the double bill of *The Stronger* and *The Maids* continues to speak well for the Guild's talented ensemble.

Jean Genet's *The Maids* usually needs no curtain raiser, but it gets one here in August Strindberg's terse, taut opening piece *The Stronger*. In what is essentially a monologue, one actress confronts another about a suspected indiscretion. Adding to the tension is the fact that it's the 1890s, and they are in a public cafe on Christmas Eve. Alternating in the roles on successive nights, Kate Waring and Jeannine Welles work well together under the unobtrusive direction of Brian Colburn, and Grace C. Renn provides support as a server at the cafe.

Contrasting with the genteel nature of this short play is Genet's wild

and raucous view of *The Maids*. This classic drama is a scaring look at class separation, as two servants act out their subservient relationship with their mistress while she's away, all the while planning their employer's demise.

Director Robert Cicchini has raised the stakes, taking his actresses through a veritable obstacle course in their role-playing antics. Diane Nuttall and A. Michele Fitzgerald are impressive and uninhibited as the title characters, sisters whose incessant need for love and validation drive them to desperate measures. J. Robin Miller indeed "sparkles" as the late-arriving mistress of the house, commanding the stage with her comically confident manner. On alternate nights, the roles are played by Moira Walley, Kristine Knudson and Grace C. Renn.

The technical accomplishments for this production are of the highest standard, particularly John Iacovelli's incredibly evocative settings, David Edwards, Jr.'s invaluable lighting and the uncredited costumes. Cicchini, Fitzgerald and Colburn handle the sound chores.

At one point, a character exclaims, "I'm not a maid, I have a noble soul." It is a fitting call for humanity and a unifying message for all of us to remember.

—Elias Stimac



J. Robin Miller, Diane Nuttall and A. Michele Fitzgerald in a scene from 'Maids'