

# theatre

## THE MAIDS *The Hudson Guild*



"The Maids," written during one of Genet's many prison sentences, is the story of two sisters who work as maids and who fantasize of escaping the bonds of slavery and common servitude through criminality and murder. It is only in death that these sisters/maids can alter their fate and finally become masters of their own destiny. This is a daunting premise, and Genet spins this tale in a surreal, at times comical, at

times frightening way. Fantasy and reality mix together to produce singular and powerful truths. Containing everything from fantasy maid/Madame scenes, to the intimations of incest, to a shocking but powerful rape scene between the sisters involving the use of a whip handle, the audience is challenged to explore the nature of slavery versus freedom, and to draw their own conclusions as to what freedom really consists of in the end.

The play opens with one of the sisters pretending to be the Madame to the other sister's maid with an alarm clock nearby to remind them when to stop and switch roles. Both of the maids, Solange and Claire (played respectively by Dianne Nuttall and Kristine Knudson) are a marvel to watch as what starts out as a make-believe game quickly begins to take on the proportions of a murder that must occur. Nuttall, as the more powerful sister, takes on the role of a woman teetering on the brink of insanity, and plays it quite well. She never resorts to over-acting and gives her role of Solange an eerie edge that keeps the audience ever watchful of her next move. Knudson, as the more impressionable sister, compliments Nuttall by matching her wit for wit as the two sisters begin to unravel and descend into madness. Knudson conveys a weakness and insecurity that transforms into a climactic dominance with great skill.

Madame, as played by J. Robin Miller, is the beautiful oppressor personified. Some of the play's more comical moments come as we watch her cavort in front of her dressing table mirror admiring herself, oblivious to the fate that awaits her if she would only drink the poisoned tea that the sisters/maids keep trying to give her. Miller is delightful in her role, coaxing rage and hurt out of the sisters/maids with the mere careless shrug of a shoulder or the raising of an eyebrow. The rich are careless, and Miller captures that carelessness down to the last gesture.

The set is a beautiful replication of a rich woman's room with a carefully placed floor length mirror that both distorts and deepens the space. The direction by Robert Cicchini guides this story effortlessly to its devastating end. To tell you who is murdered would be unfair. Suffice to say that the price some people are willing to pay for freedom, and how this play resolves that dilemma will remain with you long after the

## REVIEWS

By Mary Marin, Ph.D.

curtain call.

"The Maids" can be seen at The Hudson Guild, 6543 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood, through Jan. 27th. For more information call (213) 683-3543.

## THE STRONGER *The Hudson Guild*



"The Stronger" is a short gem of a play in which two friends meet accidentally at a cafe on Christmas Eve and engage in a battle of verbal revelations and weighty silence over the issue of one man, and who he has chosen to marry. Madame X, played

by Kate Waring, begins the encounter by noting that she is on her way home to her husband while Mademoiselle Y, played by Jeannine Welles, is sitting alone with a book as her only companion, destined to go home alone to an empty house.

All is not as it seems, however, as the monologue by Mme. X begins to spin out of control and escalates into a vicious attack on her friend Mlle. Y for having lost in this contest where the first prize is a husband. Kate Waring turns in a powerful performance as a woman who ought to feel victorious, by her own standards of success, yet does not. Instead she is consumed by the need to wound her friend. The reasons why are what form the crux of this play, and to discuss these reasons would give away the painful and startling climax of this piece. Waring's performance is a study in mounting tension. Alternately sweet and cajoling then spiteful and biting, Waring gives her role a wide range of character and movement which she handles expertly.

Mlle. Y, as played by Jeannine Welles, is equally powerful in her silence and refusal to parry and counter attack. Although she remains silent in the face of Waring's fury, her face poignantly conveys every emotion from grief, to loss, to ironical bemusement. Welles is eloquent in her silence, and pulls off this difficult role with grace.

Although The Hudson Guild is a small theatre, the space is well structured and the stage set captures the cafe setting in a realistic and believable manner. The Director, Brian Colburn, shows a strong hand in his ability to direct this piece, knowing when to pull his actors forward and when to pull them gently back. A clue to this play, and one that makes it well worth seeing is the premise that one can win the war but lose the battle. A good show to see.

"The Stronger" can be seen at The Hudson Guild, 6543 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood, until Jan. 27. For more information call (213) 683-3543.