

The Maids serves complex, symbolic food for thought

theatre review

The Maids

Runs until 29 September at 7:30pm
Starting Nick Green, Garrett Ross and Rylan Wilkie
Directed by Ian Leung
Timms Centre

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Arts & Entertainment Staff

Social identity. Reality and fantasy. Murder. These themes all go hand-in-hand in Jean Genet's play *The Maids*.

The piece tells the story of two maids who take turns dressing up as their mistress, Madame, as a way to deal both with their hatred of her and also with their feelings towards their own place in life. But fantasy soon obfuscates reality as the maids' imagined murder of Madame slowly becomes a possibility in the real world. The result is a gripping and thought-provoking piece, made even better by the actors cast into their respective roles.

When Genet wrote *The Maids*, he wanted men to perform the three female roles; this production fulfills his request, with the three actors rising to the challenge very well. They seem to slip naturally into their feminine roles; however, after maids Claire (Rylan Wilkie) and Solange (Garrett Ross) finish their first role-play as Madame, their speech patterns sound like those stereotypically attributed to gay male characters (think Nathan Lane in *The Birdcage*). It's a slight deviation from the characters' portrayal in the

rest of the play, but the duo play off each other very well in to depicting the complex relationship and dynamic power struggle between Claire and Solange.

In his portrayal of the haughty yet flaky Madame, Nick Green adds not only some comic relief, but also another level of complexity to the plot. Green captures Madame's feminine body language and mannerisms perfectly, yet plays it all with enough ambiguity to leave room for audience members to interpret for themselves why Madame behaves the way she does.

Those who are willing to think, to challenge themselves, and to extrapolate meaning from a highly symbolic piece will be delighted.

The set design makes it clear that Madame's life oozes with wealth and luxury: her lifestyle surrounds the maids each day, yet it's completely out of their reach. Dresses made with lush fabrics and rich colours hang in display cases; later, these provide the maids with costumes as they take part in their role-playing ritual.

Adding to the extravagance is an array of wigs in different styles and colours—one is even reminiscent of a *Labyrinth*-era David Bowie. Elaborate flower arrangements round out the collection of objects that depict the wealth disparity between the mistress and her servants. Together, these aspects of the



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MAID IN EDMONTON Symbolism's the name of the gender-bending game in Studio Theatre's *The Maids*.

set create a pleasing image for the eye, while highlighting one of the sources of frustration for the maids.

The back of the set, which includes a large staircase and a series of metal tubes that are raised and lowered at key points throughout the play, also helps convey the theme of entrapment in a specific social identity. The actors work very efficiently within their space, and their interaction with the set depicts two other key themes of the play: the

fakeness of theatre and the acting that exists behind social role development.

The play is based heavily in conversation and symbols; people who feel that theatre must contain a lot of action will be disappointed. However, those who are willing to think, to challenge themselves, and to extrapolate meaning from a highly symbolic piece will be delighted.

The Maids is a complex and meaningful play that draws its strength

not only from the script, but also from the interpretation that's left open, as well as from the well-timed humorous moments. While the cast and crew create much of the play's interpretation, plenty of it remains ambiguous, requiring individuals to fill in the gaps and ascribe their own meaning to what they are seeing. This is ultimately where the meaning behind *The Maids* truly lies: in your own interpretations.

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