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## Romping good time with The Maids

By Colin MacLean

Just to make sure we don't mistake what is to follow as anything but unreal, Ian Leung, the director of this intriguing Studio Theatre production of Jean Genet's *The Maids*, has his crew carry on a part of the set.

Genet's stage directions are projected onto a screen.

Which one of the actors checks - to make sure he is leaving the stage correctly. One of Genet's preoccupations as a playwright was to demonstrate that theatre was artifice and Leung sure takes him at his word.

Genet also wanted all three women's roles to be played by men and again, the director follows his dictate. Genet was a great 20th century French Theatre of the Absurd playwright. An orphan, a criminal, a homosexual and a prostitute, he was saved from a certain prison term when the French government (under pressure) decided he was something of a national treasure.

As *The Maids* opens, Claire (Rylan Wilkie) and Solange (Garett Ross) are playing their "scene." Each night when Madame (Nick Green) goes out, one puts on their employer's clothes and in an elaborate ritual, subjects the other to a bizarre, sado-masochistic, role-playing degradation.

On this night, however, the game takes on a dangerous psychological spiral. This is the night the two decide to actually kill the hated Madame.

Their view of Madame is their own twisted creation. When we meet her, she's superior and a little cruel possibly, but certainly not the soul-destroying monster the two have concocted out of their own hatred.

And what an entrance Madame makes.

After an almost hour-long buildup, there is a flourish of music, and she rises in a cloud of smoke, tall and angular with a head of blond curls, draped in white fur and adding an interesting dimension of homoerotic fervour.

Leung directs his cast to play grandly and Green swans about the stage like some cross-dressing force of nature.

Later, evading a cup of poisoned tea, she charges out into the night in search of her lover, taking the light with her when she goes.

The maids then go back to their lethal game, which ends in death.

Or does it?

As is always the case with Genet, illusion is the only reality and reality is a lie. That is to say, an illusion.

What fun and what an engrossing evening of theatre this company has given us.

On Robert Shannon's expressive black metal and eerie light-slashed set, Leung ramps up the theatricality and psychosexual tension.

Ross's sad sack Solange is an excellent foil for Green's haughty arrogance and the game of dominance/submission they play is vicious, yet simple and almost childlike. Just the way Genet saw it 60 years ago - ambivalent, often confusing and always disturbing.

4 suns of five.

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