

Review: The Maids

Hedgepig Theatre Company give an excitingly troublesome production of *The Maids*. [Lily Luty reviews](#)

Saturday 6 June 2015



Image: Hedgepig Theatre

Venue: The Fleeting Arms

★★★★☆

Stepping into Hedgepig Theatre's latest production of 'The Maids', you feel as though you're entering a new and unfamiliar world. Strange sounds echo across the bare walls, shadows loom around us and two sisters explore the stage and play with guttural sniffs and animalistic movements. There is no room for relaxed pre-show conversation here, the audience sit still, immersed in an atmosphere so organic you can almost smell it, fearing they will interrupt the ceremony that fills the room.

This is a show filled with stellar performances from its small cast. Victoria Delaney was filled with charisma and energy as she lightly danced the stage as Madame, truly 'sparkling' as her maids remarked. Anna Rose James manages a subtle and complex portrayal of Claire, delightfully contrasting with her melodramatic portrayal of Madame, maintaining a sense of openness and vulnerability without sacrificing the strengths of her character. At times, she could have benefited from performing on a larger scale, especially as some lines were unfortunately lost.

But it is Gemma Sharp that truly steals the show with her remarkable performance as Solange. Filled with beauty, strength and cruelty, Sharp expertly navigated Genet's difficult passages with a dark energy, her eyes glittering as she held the audience captive, glued to her every word. It came as a shock when her

bitter and cruel Solange revealed a genuine care for her sister when she became overwhelmed and ill, dropping all performance of cruelty and carrying Claire to bed.

The relationship between these two sisters was poignantly developed and displayed through Sarah Cotterill's movement direction. However, more focus should have been placed on scriptwork; at times we witnessed genuine conversation, but in comparison to the freedom and organic nature of the movement of our characters some exchanges felt stilted in comparison, highlighting the boundaries created by Genet's script.

Similarly, the layers of ambiguity became stifling at times, and the audience grew steadily uneasy, waiting for a breath of clarity between the changing characters and plots to murder. The performance would benefit from stronger directorial navigation through this confusing world, without it strong moments within the play run the risk of becoming lost. The relationship between our maids and their madame could also have been established more strongly. The strong emotions detailed in the conversation of the maids were not satisfactorily reflected within Madame herself, who did not seem odious enough to warrant the unhealthy and obsessive attention she receives from her maids.

While Victoria Delaney maintained a subtle and refreshing portrayal of cruelty and privilege, it fell against the dramatic underworld of the maids who, in turn, then seemed to be played too eagerly as villains and martyrs. Genet's social commentary is no longer sufficient to explain itself; a contemporary audience is unfamiliar with this harsh class divide and servitude, and requires further reason other than class, wealth or martyrdom for Madame's murder.



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