

# ENTERTAINMENT

## Play dredges the darker side

**The Maids**  
by Jean Genet  
Northern Lights Theatre until April 1

review by Anna Borowiecki  
As the applause from *The Maids* died down, the audience quickly dispersed from the Walter Kaasa Theatre to the fresh air in the Jubilee parking lot.

A breath of air was sorely needed to regain a shaky equilibrium. For two straight hours three actresses had drawn out our deepest feelings of horror and disgust.

Perhaps in a closer analysis it is really playwright Jean Genet who strips the emotions of their defenses and twists all intelligent thought into a pretzel. He explores the darkest corners of the mind with one of his basic philosophies: evil is a necessary and positive influence that prevents society from stagnating.

Genet adopted this concept when at the age of ten he was charged with theft and so decided to become a thief. By the age of twenty-one he was well into a life of crime that included thieving, pimping and prostitution.

While serving one of many prison terms, Genet began to write and in 1947 wrote *The Maids* based on a grisly murder which scorched the French papers for weeks.

His characters are the outcasts of society, the second-class citizens who consider themselves the debris of society. Their only escape is to imprison themselves in fantasy.

But, contrasting their external ugliness, the outcasts have an eloquence of speech that takes them far above the common man.

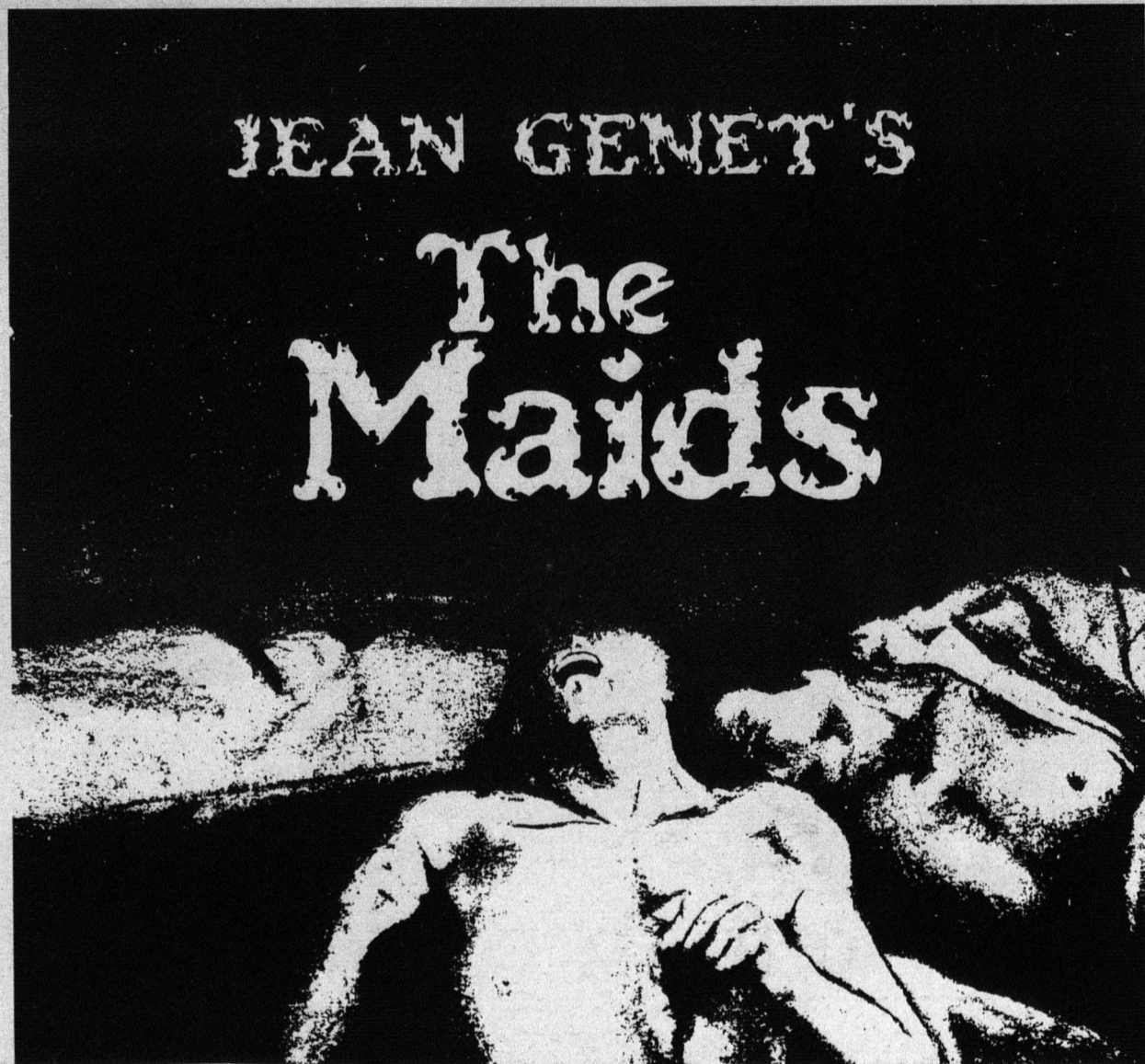
In *The Maids*, Claire and Solange, two servants, resent their wealthy employer to such a degree that they plot her murder. But their diabolical hatred only serves to bring their eventual destruction.

Claire, Solange, and Madame are reflections of each other linked in a love-hate relationship. But their diabolical hatred only serves to bring about their eventual destruction. In the petted and pampered Madame, the two sisters see what they most admire and would like to ape.

But reflected in each other they see the bleakness of their existence, "puckered elbows... wasted bodies," and they despise themselves.

To brighten their mundane existence, Solange and Claire invent a game. They impersonate Madame whenever she is absent.

The game is repeated so many times it becomes a ritual. And each time the ritual is



played it becomes more difficult to let go of the illusion of playing Madame and returning to the reality of servitude.

Eventually the lines separating fantasy and reality become too blurred. Claire reaches the point whereby she cannot return to servitude but must remain in the reality she has created in her mind.

Jane Buss is a sensitive actress whose Claire is at first taunting and arrogant. As the play progresses, the arrogance spirals into hysteria and eventually plummets into a quiet, deadly resolution.

The emotionally charged Jill Dyck portrays Solange as a passionate and violent woman embittered to the point of destruction. But Dyck's Solange is also capable of a tender love for her sister. It is also an erotic incestuous love completely unnatural in its environment and therefore doomed.

But once Judith Mabey laughs her way onto the stage, all eyes focus on her and remain riveted. Under Mabey's control, Madame is a silly empty-headed creature whose cocoon of wealth keeps her perpetually young and worry free.

Yet Mabey's Madame is not totally devoid of human feeling for others. Within the limitations of her personality, she genuinely cares for her servants.

It is this touch of humanity in Mabey's otherwise selfish Madame that makes the sisters' actions all the more monstrous and inexplicable.

In a world where the worker has become a heroic figure, it must have been a temptation for director Brian Deedrick to turn *The Maids* into a propaganda play.

Instead, he chose to concentrate on exploring the human psyche and the

growing sense of alienation we all feel. And in the process we discover that the outcasts of society are no different from anyone else.

Robyn Ayles' bedroom set is light, airy and elegant, with a definite dream-like quality to it. But the oppressive quality inherent in Genet's text is missing. If at times *The Maids* appears to have staging contradictions, the fault may lie more with the playwright than the artistic interpreters. Genet demands that the "fantasies of sex and power should be staged with the solemnity and outward splendour of the liturgy."

In the same breath he demands that productions be "vulgar, violent, and in bad taste." These two opposing concepts are downright difficult if not impossible to stage simultaneously.

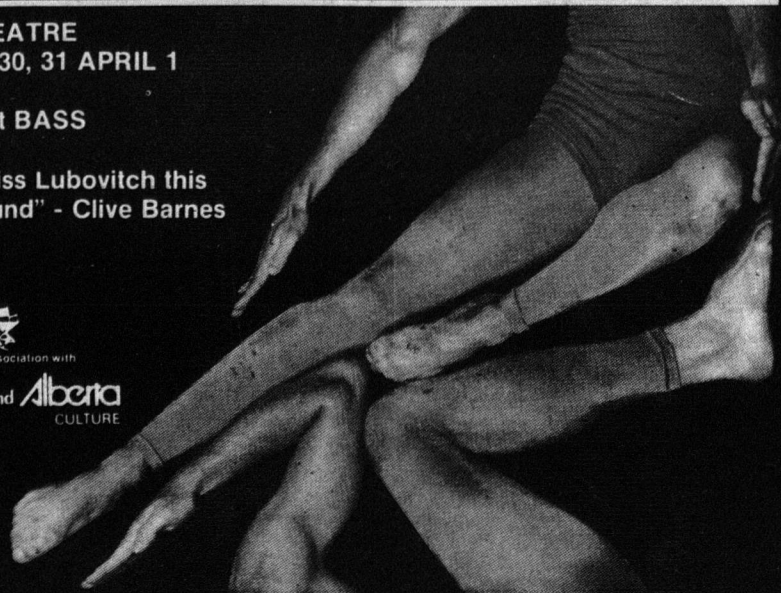
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