

REVIEWS

# Seduced by a siren

Step aside, Evita—a new Argentinian diva shines at Miracle Theatre

BY TIMOTHY KRAUSE

Across the river from the main drag of Darcelle XV, Miracle Theatre has set up camp with *Sirena, Queen of the Tango*.

This Latino farce from Arizona playwright Guillermo Reyes is as elaborate as the tango itself. Like a bawdy and tumultuous clip show strung together from film noir classics, *Sirena* follows a police detective on a homicide case. In his search for the criminal, the Sergeant finds the dame—in this case, Sirena, a gay Argentine transvestite whose trail is littered with the bodies of ex-husbands.

Sirena is sultrier than a summer night in Buenos Aires, and it takes only one look for the Sergeant to fall for this leading lady—"as long as she's dressed like a lady." But Sirena's stone-cold heart won't succumb. The Sergeant tries to move on but is pulled back by Sirena's dance of death, one that leads to a vigorous courtroom intercourse before a lusty lesbian judge.

Will Sirena finally give up her torch song nights to go straight? Or will the Sergeant be her last tango partner before this femme fatale is led to the slammer?

Andrés Alcalá, last seen as Molina in Miracle Theatre's *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, inhabits the show's namesake role. He's a temptress with perfect opposing rhythms of graceful wit and biting banter. (Not to mention a shapely figure and fashion to cry for—even Chicago's Renée Zellweger couldn't make prison stripes this glamorous.)

Rafael Untalan plays the Sergeant—a smokin' gumshoe who's not just another heterosexual heel, and he gives this eventual bisexual an attractive mix of virility and sensitivity. He, too, was last seen in *Spider Woman* and, like Alcalá, carefully straddles the thin line between homo homage and dick dreck.



PHOTO BY ALAN REYES

There's always a dame: What detective could hold his own against Sirena, Queen of the Tango?

Making her Portland directorial debut, Sacha Reich sets her "edgy oddballs" amid a funny but feverish atmosphere charged with sexual ambiguity.

The agile cast handles multiple (many cross-gender) roles with exuberant flamboyance, including those of psycho secretary (Andy Buzan), golem boytoy (Timothy Scarrott), anal detective (Paddric M. Fitzgerald), slimy lawyer (Dan Palma) and a bitter, probably closeted district attorney practicing to be another Helen Gamble (Laura Faye Smith). **J**

MIRACLE THEATRE, 525 S.E. Stark St., presents *Sirena, Queen of the Tango* 7:30 p.m. Thursday and 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday through March 15. Ticket are \$13-\$15 from 503-236-7253 or gretchen@milagro.org.

# Problem child

CoHo Productions' latest is banal and belabored

BY TIMOTHY KRAUSE

As much as Miracle Theatre's *Sirena* is candy for the pedestrian masses, CoHo Productions' *Child of Pleasure* is an acquired taste for an erudite few.

In this historical comedy, Drammy-winning gay Portland playwright William S. Gregory undresses the wit and wisdom of Ninon de L'Enclos, a French prostitute cum philosopher. Scarred from her broken, upper-middle-class home, she embraces the alternative, Epicurean lifestyle, wrapping herself in a world fond of luxury that seeks pleasure over pain.

This haven is soon interrupted, however, by the startling return of her deadbeat dad with whom she dredges up the past, fights the present and ultimately reconciles the two. A story familiar to many queers, but still no fairy tale.

*Child of Pleasure* is the first in a trilogy of plays by Gregory examining the ahead-of-her-times Ninon through modern eyes. Instead of such a drawn-out affair, the cycle might be better conceived as a one-night stand, with *Child* an effective introduction to this freethinking strumpet's entire life.

As it was, at least one audience member nodded off, and the night's best line was heard from backstage at intermission when some gic-

gling female voice wildly implored to her girlfriend (one assumes), "Put your dress on!"

To his credit, Gregory's language is gracefully lyrical. He thoughtfully explores how our personal philosophies are shaped and tested by the people and events in our lives. The play's conflict between estranged parent and adult child, however, is stilted and its overwrought wit a bit trying. Who knew the rebellious life of a 17th century whore could be so dull?

As Ninon, buxom and beautiful Emily Sahler Beleele provided a solid pivot to a world that spins out of her control. Gary Norman is droll as her fawning fey foil. But Curt Hanson's portrayal of Ninon's disruptive father is unconvincing, and jabs from Paul Floding as Ninon's playwright pal are painful.

What succeeded, however, were the show's production elements. Set designer Frederick Zal and lighting designer Jesse Smith provided plush environs, while costumes designed by Margaret Chapman nearly stole the show. **J**

CoHo PRODUCTIONS' *Child of Pleasure* continues at 8 p.m. Thursday to Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday through March 15 at CoHo Theater, 2257 N.W. Raleigh St. Tickets are \$16-\$18 from 503-220-2646.

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