

KANSAS CITY
ACTORS THEATRE

Psychological thriller keeps audiences guessing

By Bob Evans

Brian Paulette/Kansas City
Actors Theatre



Kansas City Actors Theatre again rings the bell with a stunning, intense, cat and mouse game of “Truth or Consequences” as the hunter becomes the hunted; and, the question of mental stability causes the audience to question the motivation and opportunity of the three central characters in Ariel Dorfman’s “Death and the Maiden.”

Power shifts throughout this one-act, 90-minute play as the idea of truth, memory, lies, deceit weave an intricate web among the three characters. Somewhere in an unnamed country, a struggling new democratic government wants to move forward from a former dictatorship. Geraldo (Rusty Sneary), an up and coming political official, receives an offer from the new president for a huge promotion. His wife, Paulina (Vanessa Severo), the audience discovers suffers from an unknown occurrence of her past. A stranger, Roberto (Robert Gibby Brand), mysteriously offers Geraldo a ride home after a flat

tire and within a few hours finds himself bound, gagged, and facing the barrel of Paulina's hand gun.



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As the play unfolds, the audience learns that something horrible happened in Paulina's past. Since then she has built a new life with Geraldo, but her past remains a troubling, tormented secret. Then, in a bizarre twist of fate, the perpetrator of Paulina's condition sits in her living room talking with her husband.

The game now shifts and the audience watches while the power and energy switches and sways between Paulina and Roberto. Geraldo, torn between the two stories, questions each character's veracity. He must believe his wife, but Roberto's account makes more sense. What's real, what's accurate memory, what's delusion, what's imagined, what's inaccurate—all create a ball of confusion until the final minutes when the audience learns the truth.

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Director Cinnamon Schultz undertook a difficult production with “Death and the Maiden” because the play, though smooth, leave gaps that not always fill in completely. To create a flowing and consistent pace, the director must keep the dialogue and power shifts carefully focused on the characters. The movement and timing needs precision to keep the framework tight and not allow the audience to ponder too many questions. The focus needs to remain on discoveries in the moment and not allow questions to distract the viewers’ mind. Character names, Geraldo, Roberto, and Paulina create enough distraction to cause the audience to wonder the play’s setting. The reason behind Paulina’s mental state also can distract. Schultz assembled the trio of actors who can keep their characters strong, seemingly normal, and keeps the psychological mind-games constantly pushing the plot forward at rapidity. The pace keeps “Death of a Maiden” constantly changing and twisting.



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Assembling a cast of KC’s wealth of talented actors guarantees audiences unique character deployment. With Brand, Severo, and Sneary, no production could fail. Each always brings carefully constructed and multi-leveled characters that know how to tease viewers by slowly showing nuances as their characters unfold individual situations, motives, and opportunity. All three actors overcome the awkwardness of an unknown setting in an unknown country, with uncommon American names and paint a tableau that grabs the audience in the first scenes as subtle tidbits seed the mystery to follow. With each character’s

entrance, the body language, facial expressions, the dialogue, and general presentation of each character set a tone for the developing story. Beautiful chemistry and energy make the exchanges riveting.

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Consistent with KCAT productions, all phases of the production shine with perfection on stage with the actors and the behind the scenes magic created by the production team. The set, the lighting, the sound, the costumes, the props, the projections, the sound and light cues—all show the attention to detail in creating a slick, richly-textured show.

The production team is Georgianna Londre Buchanan, costume designer; Kyle Dyck, technical director; Colin Fowler, assistant stage manager; Mary Allison Joseph, dramaturg; Deborah Morgan, properties designer; Gary Mosby, scenic design; Alex Murphy, stage manager; Jon Robertson, sound design; Shane Rowse, lighting and projection design; Cinnamon Schultz, director; Paige Stallings, wardrobe; Taylor Jene Sullivan, production assistant.

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“Death and the Maiden” runs on City Stage on the lower level of Union Station from January 9 – 27. Evening performances begin at 7:30p.m. Matinees begin at 2 p.m. Tickets and more information may be found on the KCAT website or by calling the Central Ticket Office at 816-235-6222.

Tags: KCAT, Kansas City Actors Theatre, City Stage, Union Station, Kansas City Theatre, Kansas City Performing Arts, Kansas City Arts & Entertainment, Death and the Maiden