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ALEXIS SOLOSKI | THEATER REVIEW

Three-Ring Dread in a One-Act Series

IN SO MANY TWO-CHARACTER scenes, a moment comes when you wonder: Why are these people still in the room together? Shouldn't she have left? Shouldn't he have called security? Is this some strange parallel doorknob-less universe?

In the third iteration of "AdA: Author Directing Author," an evening of one-acts at La MaMa, there are moments of such doubt in the Italian playwright Marco Calvani's "After the Dark" and the Spanish playwright Marta Buchaca's "Summit," which have both been given fine, playable translations.

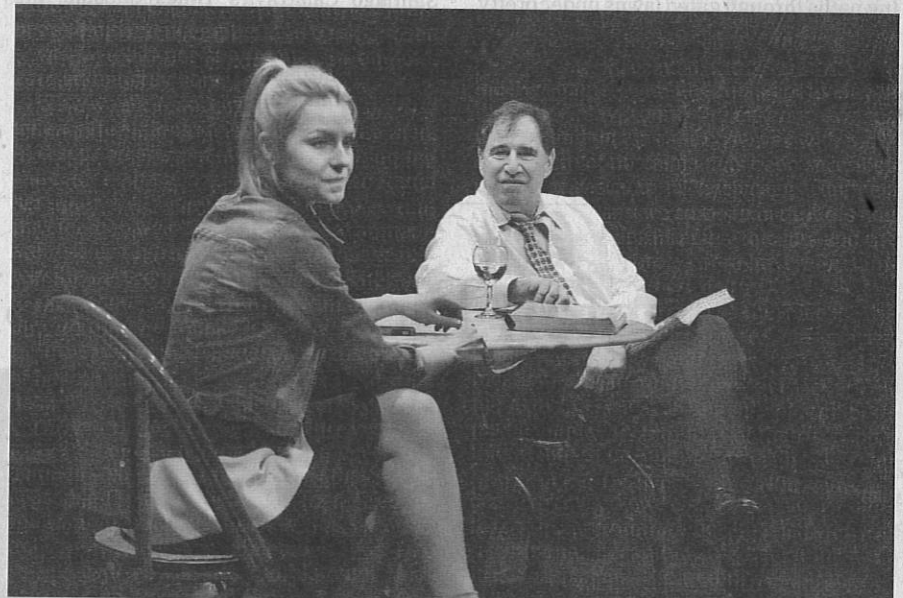
In "After the Dark," a post-menopausal designer of furniture and lighting, Susie (Margaret Colin), and her young assistant, Jessie (Gabby Beans), are sharing a hotel room on the night before an important trade show. Mr. Calvani's pert dialogue plays with the oppositions of youth and age, fecundity and sterility, dominance and obligation, and the women take turns controlling the conversation.

Under Ms. Buchaca's direction, many of the shifts in dynamic compel, although an unthinking equation of sexual desirability and power needs more scrutiny. And why Jessie, who is paid starvation wages, doesn't exit the job and the room is anyone's guess.

In the otherwise absorbing "Summit," it's a puzzler why a new mayor (Dalia Davi) doesn't order her predecessor (Victor Slezak) escorted out of what is now her office. She keeps insisting she has a lot of work to do, but he stays around, needling her, belittling her and insisting they take a selfie together. Under Neil LaBute's direction, a few details feel off. Would a mayor really arrive for her first day at the office in stretch pants and a leather jacket?

But Ms. Buchaca's play is so topical that it resists analysis. The spectacle of a female candidate competing against a self-serving, bloviating male one still feels way too raw. (A central metaphor revolves around Edmund Hillary, for goodness' sake.) It also offers the notion, now quaint, that one careless tweet could destroy a political career. If only.

Let's say this of Mr. LaBute: We always know why his characters stay in the room, or, as in "I Don't Know What I Can Save You From," at the cafe. He's a master at ratcheting up the tension and risk. But here he returns to his frequent and rather tired as-



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Gia Crovatin and Richard Kind in Neil LaBute's "I Don't Know What I Can Save You From."

sertion that most men are brutes, and most women are witches. Not the pointy-hatted kind.

Simon (Richard Kind) and his adult daughter Janie (Gia Crovatin) are meeting at a cafe after a three-year separation. Janie has a proposal. If Simon would like to meet his grandson, he must sign a contract making him responsible for heavy fines if his best behavior fails. Simon is not enthused.

Maybe this seems like a fair fight. It isn't. Mr. LaBute has his thumb on the scales, weighting the play against Janie. Under Mr. Calvani's direction, she is eventually subject to a violent and highly sexualized scene of humiliation, made even more pervy by Jeff Mahshie's costuming. The script and Ms. Crovatin render her as such a mouthy, bratty little horror that the audience at a preview performance cheered and applauded, a reaction the play didn't ask them to question or regret.

Maybe Mr. LaBute wants us to evaluate how quickly our own brutality might kick in, our own chauvinism might surface. But with Ms. Crovatin's short skirt hiked up over her buttocks, it didn't feel that way. It felt despicable. I knew why those two characters were in the room; I wished I were somewhere else.

ADA: AUTHOR DIRECTING AUTHOR

Tickets Through Feb. 5 at the Ellen Stewart Theater, LaMaMa, Manhattan; 212-352-3101, lamama.org. Running time: 1 hour 30 minutes.

Credits "After the Dark" by Marco Calvani; directed by Marta Buchaca; translated by Allison Eikerenkoetter; "Summit" by Ms. Buchaca; directed by Neil LaBute; translated by H. J. Gardner; "I Don't Know What I Can Save You From" by Mr. LaBute; directed by Mr. Calvani; sets by Neil Patel; lighting by Alex Jainchill; costumes by Jeff Mahshie; assistants to the directors, Ms. Eikerenkoetter, Diego Chiri and Ali Keller; stage manager, Miriam Hyfler; fight director Rick Sordelet. Presented by La MaMa, Mia Yoo, artistic director.

Cast "After the Dark," with Gabby Beans and Margaret Colin. "Summit," with Dalia Davi and Victor Slezak. "I Don't Know What I Can Save You From," with Gia Crovatin and Richard Kind.