
Plague infects 'One Flea Spare'

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Whistler in the Dark's production of Naomi Wallace's "One Flea Spare" brings to light the human frailties tested during the time of the Black Death. Amid the backdrop of this disease-ridden world, love and loyalty are harder to find and deception is rampant, as one upper-class couple, a sailor and a girl are forced to remain together in a single room for a month under quarantine. Under Meg Taintor's direction, "One Flea Spare" opens and closes doors to the human heart as the characters confront disease, death and — almost as heartbreakingly — survival.

When the sailor Bunce (Curt Klump) and the girl Morse (Jen O'Connor) break into a home looking for supplies and shelter, they find themselves quickly imprisoned. The owners of the house, Snelgrave (Jeff Gill) and Darcy (Lorna Nogueira), must live with the two strangers, spending the majority of their time in a single room — the only room where no one has died. The new situation is undesirable to everyone involved, leaving the characters fighting for survival against each other as well as the plague.

O'Connor conducts a striking performance as the young, slightly demonic girl Morse. Her opening monologue is dramatic and her gaze incredibly spellbinding throughout the performance. As the first and last voice in the production, it is tempting to let her character assume the role of narrator, yet Morse's history and personality are troublesome, and her stories lack credibility.

Discovering the truth is not easy; revelations require betrayals and accusations from every character until the plague puts an end to it all. O'Connor perfects her character's disturbingly promiscuous and morbid nature and yet succeeds as the enchanter, leaving one equally eager for her next line and horrified in anticipation of it.

Kabe (Ben Chase) is the guardsman for the four other characters and the only one who has the freedom to come and go at will. However, this luxury has not made him sympathetic or less fearful. Kabe is callous with his games and jokes, just as desperate for human sympathy and comfort as the rest. In bribing those confined in the house, Kabe's lust and monetary desire are satisfied. He too must survive

and is equally threatened with the plague. Chase is comical yet threatening in the role, mastering his position as comedian and enforcer.

Curious desire propels the play as the characters ask more than they sometimes wish to know of one another. It is at these moments when the script is brutally upfront. When Snelgrave attempts to ask Bunce what he does to satisfy his sexual desires when he is at sea for long periods of time, Snelgrave desperately tries to imply what he wants without actually asking for it. When Bunce's only answer is to suddenly force an orange onto Snelgrave's finger and then eat it, Gill flawlessly portrays genuine shock and understanding at what the character both desires and expects. This moment is one of unspoken truth.

The Factory Theatre is the perfect venue for this type of performance, forcing an intimacy that the characters themselves must overcome. The set is simple and spare, consisting of only a ladder, a doorframe and a couple of chairs. It is an environment where no one can hide, compelling the characters to reveal their secret wounds and unspoken desires.

Disease in many different forms works as a theme throughout the entire performance. All of the characters struggle with their own diseases under the frightening context of the plague. Darcy and Snelgrave reveal their sick and dying marriage as a result of Snelgrave's cruel indifference and Darcy's carefully concealed skin. Bunce has a wound that will never heal, and Morse is a mentally unstable manipulator.

Illness is not a new concept for them, but the fear that follows the plague causes them to act out and expose themselves in ways they might have otherwise kept hidden. As a result, the entire play is a sort of infection that is painfully cleaned out with truths and revelations throughout its duration.

"One Flea Spare" is on stage at the Factory Theatre until Feb. 21 with performances every day of the week. Reduced prices are available for students.

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