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The Penetration Play

THEATRE

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OPENED

November 22, 2004

CLOSES

December 11, 2004

PERFORMANCES

Mon, Thu - Sun at 8pm
also Nov 23, Dec 8 at 8pm
no perf Nov 25 - 26

RUNNING TIME

1 hour, 20 minutes

TICKETS

\$15
212-868-4444

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CAST

Mandy Siegfried, Mia Barron,
Kathryn Grody

AUTHOR

Winter Miller

DIRECTOR

Josh Hecht

SETS

Robin Vest

LIGHTING

Paul Whitaker

SOUND

Eric Shim

FIGHT DIRECTOR

DeeAnn Weir

STAGE MANAGER

This is the world premiere of *The Penetration Play*, a dark comedy by Winter Miller. Set on the New Jersey shore during the last weekend of summer, the play tells the story of Rain, who wants nothing more than her best friend Ashley to want her. Ashley's mother, meanwhile, wants Ashley to marry a brilliant lawyer named Rich. The press release says "*The Penetration Play* is a comedy about things that aren't funny and the one person who should've been off-limits."

Mandy Siegfried (top) and Mia Barron
in a scene from *The Penetration Play*
(photo © Carol Rosegg)



There will be post-performance discussions on November 23 (hosted by Daphne Rubin-Vega) and December 6 (hosted by Gloria Steinem).

nytheatre.com review

Loren Noveck • November 23, 2004

The Penetration Play is the second production of the playwrights' company 13P, whose simple mission is "We don't develop plays. (We do them.)" Created by thirteen promising young writers who wanted to see their most ambitious, challenging work produced on its own terms, rather than workshopped, read, and endlessly debated through development programs, the company will fully produce one play by each of its writers over the next several seasons. The company's entire resources are put at that writer's disposal while their play is up, so what you see onstage is, in theory, the playwright's dream production of her (the company comprises 11 women and 2 men) work.

Rob Handel, 13P's managing director, reportedly asked Winter Miller for her "most outrageous play, the one that no theatre would touch." Miller has taken that challenge and written a slap in the face to those theatres who would be scared off. *The Penetration Play* does indeed go to some taboo-fraught places, but it's also almost absurdly producible: a smart, elegantly simple three-character play for strong women actors that moves like lightning—any theatre that wouldn't touch it is missing out.

Jessica Franz

PRODUCING COMPANY
13P

The set-up is basic: Ashley, in her late twenties, has again begun to date her high-school sweetheart, the guy who (at least in her mother's opinion) got away. She invites her best friend, Rain, down to her parents' summer house to meet the guy. Rain, who is not-so-secretly in love with Ashley herself (though Ashley seems—perhaps intentionally—oblivious to this fact), skips out on the meet-and-greet dinner and winds up having a late-night heart-to-heart with Ashley's mother Maggie.

That's pretty much it, in terms of a plot. Almost the entire play is composed of fast-paced, snappy scenes between two of the three characters (Ashley and Rain or Maggie and Rain; Ashley and her mother barely communicate) over a twelve-hour period. The dialogue is quick, simple, sometimes a little glib. But in a compact eighty minutes, the play poses big, heartbreaking, life-changing questions about love, desire, betrayal, taboos, secrets, the "dreadful, wonderful predictability" of marriage, and the lies we tell ourselves and each other to get through the day.

The play bills itself as a "comedy about things that aren't funny." But a lot of the humor comes from characters laughing at themselves, which can make the comedy a little bittersweet. Director Josh Hecht keeps his cast expertly walking the boundaries between sardonic self-deprecation, existential dread, and pouring out their hearts to each other at the slightest prompting.

All three actors give sharp, smart performances. Kathryn Grody, as Maggie, has the most complex emotional journey within the play, and stands out because of the deftness and subtlety with which she handles it. Mia Barron as Ashley and Mandy Siegfried as Rain are also terrific, especially in building up a friendship that's shown in their physicality as much as in their language. The ways that Hecht keeps these two always scuffling, wrestling, challenging each other with their bodies becomes especially important because the nature of the friendship itself—how and why these two became friends and have remained close for so many years—is almost entirely in the subtext rather than in the writing itself. This elision can be a little bit frustrating, since that friendship is the motor of the plot. But Miller, Barron, Siegfried, and Hecht make us believe in the relationship even if we never completely understand it, keeping up a constant edge of aggression and sexual tension, while still clearly showing the affection between these two.

The production design is equally strong. Robin Vest's perfectly detailed set wreaks a jaw-dropping transformation of the black-box Mint Space into a spacious upper-middle-class summer home, complete with crown moldings, decorative plates on the walls, and 1970s-ish patterned wallpaper in the kitchen. Vest's precision is complemented by Paul Whitaker's clever use of practical lighting—the table lamps, sconces, and ceiling fixtures we see on the set. The music in Eric Shim's sound design provides contrast, and a reminder that the pristine suburban world we see onstage is a bit alien to Ashley and Rain.

The Penetration Play is not easy to describe without giving away its secrets, and at times it's not easy to watch, but I can't stop thinking about it. Based on the evidence of this outstanding production (as well as 13P's first show, *The Internationalist*), the company's work is going on my must-see list—both for the quality of the playwriting and for their passion for and commitment to producing those plays beautifully.