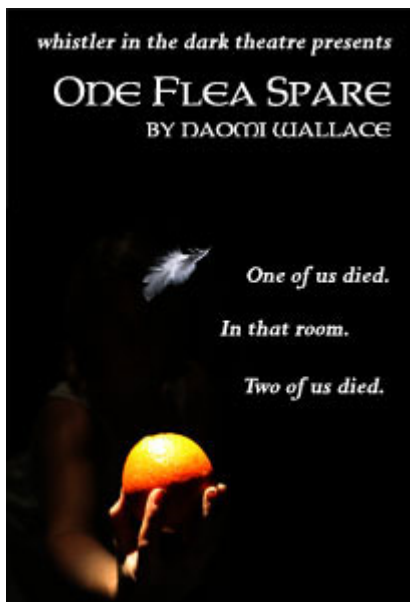




Entertainment :: Theatre

One Flea Spare

by Kilian Melloy
Tuesday Feb 9, 2010



[EMAIL](#) [PRINT](#) [SHARE](#)

One Flea Spare, by playwright Naomi Wallace, falls into the tricky "scorpions in a bucket" genre, which is hard to pull off; Wallace, however, makes the play a genuine slice of theatrical literature, and the cast of the Whistler in the Dark production, continuing at The Factory Theatre in Boston through February 21, live up to the play's potential. For two and a half hours, The Factory's small, intimate space is charged with palpable, electrical tension, piercing performances, and improbable comic flourishes; the audience is transported. The place is a house in London; the year is 1665--right in the middle of the Plague.

The house belongs to Mr. and Mrs. Snelgrave (Jeff Gill and Lorna Nogueira, respectively), an upper-class couple who have been quarantined for a month already following the deaths of their servants. Their term of confinement starts anew with the arrival of two uninvited guests who arrive separately but, coincidentally, on the same day. Bunce (Curt Klump) is a sailor who has just arrived in

London's deathly quiet port; he enters the Snelgrave home looking for some place safe to lie low. Morse (Jen O'Connor) is a 12-year-old girl from the house next door, where everyone has died of the disease. Like Bunce, Morse is seeking safe haven when she crawls through a window and into the Snelgraves' house.

The new month-long period of quarantine is enforced by Kabe (Ben Chase), an amoral, but strict, guard who promises to kill anyone emerging from the house before the term is up. Kabe acts as grim comic relief: whether selling dubious "cures" for outrageous sums of money or seeking sexual favors from the under-aged Morse, he's just the sort of strong-arm thug that seems to make civilization, at the level of its grimy ball bearings, chug along.

Not that the Snelgraves, tucked up high and tight in their fine house, are much better. They have all the outward trappings of respectability, from fine shoes to long-sleeved, high-necked tunics, to a walking stick fit to bash heads, but as the month wears everyone down, Mr. Snelgrave is reduced to asking his new servant, Bunce, prurient questions about the vagaries and villainies of life at sea, while the buttoned-up Mrs. Snelgrave--Darcy, to those who know her best--is ever more attracted to the wayward seaman. She's in her 40s and as starched and pressed as they come, but beneath her precisely arrayed layers of propriety, Darcy is a woman smoldering for a man's attentions: when her husband speaks of an earlier time, when smoke would pour from her mouth, he's not speaking of her suppressed sexuality, but nonetheless he's unwittingly summed her up with perfect clarity.

Bunce is happy to entertain their questions--well, most of them--though in a roughnecked, tar-brushed sort of way. He describes how the crew of one ship on which he served tossed a man overboard, adding that, "since we couldn't piss on his grave, we pissed on his back as he sank" into the depths. A gentleman he's not, though he does have the ability to be a gentle man: Klump brings the role a sunniness so genuine, but so easily apt to flash into bright, steely glimmers of threat, that the sexual tension he generates with both Mr. and Mrs. Snelgrave is thick, pungent, and mesmerizing. (Never have you seen an orange devoured more suggestively, or with more daring impudence.)

O'Connor's Morse is a wonderful blend of the precocious and the innocent--though

innocence, in this case, evaporates quickly, replaced with cunning and a sheer need to survive. This 12-year-old girl trembles on the cusp of womanhood--or feral ruthlessness: before our eyes, she learns to zero in and exploit the weaknesses of those around her.

To a degree, so do the rest of the characters, who literally and figuratively probe one another's wounds and scars. This production, directed by Meg Taintor, is spare, but fully realized: from the spot-on, lovely costuming by Emily Woods Hogue, to PJ Strachman's dreamily executed lighting design, *One Flea Spare* is as hot and urgent as any fever--a riveting theatrical triumph.

One Flea Spear plays through Feb. 21 at *The Factory Theatre*, located at 791 Tremont Street in Boston.

Tickets cost \$20 general admission (student rate is \$10; Wednesdays are pay what you can, \$5 minimum), and can be obtained online at www.whistlerinthedark.com/boxoffice.htm or via phone at 1-800-838-3006. Tickets can also be purchased at the door starting one hour before performance time.

Performance schedule: Wednesday and Thursday evenings at 7:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday evenings at 8:00 p.m.; Sundays at 3:00 p.m.

Kilian Melloy reviews media, conducts interviews, and writes commentary for *EDGEBoston*, where he also serves as Assistant Arts Editor.

[Back to: Theatre » Entertainment » Home](#)

Copyright © 2003-2010
EDGE Publications, Inc. / All Rights Reserved