

Cotuit arts center goes to Hell

Sartre's *No Exit* offers intimate preview of Hades

By Susan Blood
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There is something very appropriate about watching Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit* in a small space with 25 of one's closest friends. Rarely is an audience so acutely aware of how annoying they may be to their neighbors as they are in close quarters, watching a play about how hell is other people.

Lucky for me, the audience was very well behaved last Saturday in the new Botello Black Box at Cotuit Center for the Arts.

I was a little nervous about having the action so close I could touch the actors, but I very quickly felt like a voyeuristic fly on the wall. Here's what I observed about the freshly deceased characters of Sartre's drama:

As Inez Serrano, Susan Winslow is the most immediately frightening of the lot. She admits frankly that she "can't get on without making people suffer." Eternity with her would be very long in-

deed. The word she portrays best is "poisonous." With that in mind, her death was remarkably fitting.

As Estelle Rigault, Holly Erin McCarthy comes off sparkingly empty-headed. At first it's hard to imagine what she possibly could have done to wind up where she did. She is convinced it was a mistake. As we get to know her, it becomes abundantly clear that not only has she earned her space on Sartre's sofa, we really hope she doesn't find her way out.

Joseph Garcin, played by Rob Anderson, is in turn played by both Estelle and Inez. They both need him, but in very different ways. He needs them, too, for validation and reassurance. Estelle will give him what he wants, but in the easy giving it becomes valueless. Inez is not so easy.

The role of the expressionless valet, who escorts each character to their new home, is played unflinchingly by Stephen Coltin.

No Exit is one of those plays that stays in the head long after the last cars have left the parking lot. It raises questions about how we as humans treat each other and how one doesn't necessarily have to be dead to experience hell. It makes us wonder



NICCOLO AEED PHOTO

OH, HELL – Estelle (Holly Erin McCarthy) is welcomed to the netherworld by Inez (Susan Winslow) in Sartre's *No Exit* at the Cotuit Center for the Arts.

about the motives of others, and how appearances can be so deceiving.

I was interested to see in the program notes that the stage manager, Rose Webster, is an eighth grader at Forest-

dale School in Sandwich. She did a lovely job.

The play is a production of Theater Under the Stairs, co-founded by Holly Erin McCarthy. Chris Compton directed.

No Exit is at Cotuit Center for the Arts on Route 28 through Feb. 20, with performances Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. For tickets (\$10), call 508-428-0669.