

'No Exit' Opens Tonight At The Cotuit Center For The Arts' New Black Box Theater

By MARILYN J. ROWLAND

In the new Botello Black Box at the Cotuit Center for the Arts is the Theater Under the Stairs' production of Jean Sartre's "No Exit," a tale about three people who find out that hell is not exactly fire and brimstone, but horrifying nonetheless; hell turns out to be other people—in a small dark room with no way out. The show opens tonight and runs through February 20, with performances at 8 PM on Friday and Saturday nights and 2 PM on Sunday. Tickets for all shows are \$10.

The art center's Botello House, which was used very effectively last summer for a production of Ibsen's "Ghosts," has recently been transformed into the Black Box theater. Surfaces have been painted black, and the audience will sit in chairs around the perimeter of the room, providing a very intimate theater experience, and a sense of real involvement in the unfolding story.

Chris Compton, director of the play and, with Holly Erin McCarthy, a co-partner in Theater Under the Stairs, is young—less than two years out of college—and excited about theater and sharing the theater experience with others. "We want to make going to the theater an affordable and accessible option for people," Mr. Compton said, "a choice equivalent to going to the movies."

Mr. Compton came up with the idea to present "No Exit" after a discussion with Daniel Fontneau, producing artistic director of the Cotuit arts center, about the center's new Black Box theater. It is a "stripped and bare cube. The walls and the ceiling are black—a completely negative space. The utter simplicity allows you to focus on the actors, on the story being told, on the play itself."

"No Exit" came immediately to mind as suited to the space, Mr. Compton said. He loves the play for "its characters, its depth, and the philosophical implications of the play." The three main characters enter a dark and featureless room one by one, brought in by a valet. They try to figure out what hell is, what it all means.

"It is tightly written, it really builds, there is a lot of momentum to it," he said. And, in the Black Box, the audience, seated in a single row of chairs lining



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Holly Erin McCarthy, as Estelle, and Rob Anderson, as Joseph, explore their relationship in a scene from "No Exit," as Susan Winslow, as Inez, looks on. The show opens tonight at the Cotuit Center for the Arts' new Black Box theater.

the perimeter of the room, will have an authentic experience, "trapped right in there with the actors."

Mr. Compton discovered acting and directing in college at Swarthmore, and "fell in love" with the theater. "No Exit" is Mr. Compton's fourth play as director, the second play produced by Theater Under the Stairs. The first was a one-night-only production of "Medea" at the Cape Cod Cultural Center in South Yarmouth, a play that he plans to direct again, in Cotuit, with a standard three-week run.

As a young director, he said he is appreciative of the support and trust provided by the Cotuit Center for the Arts and excited to be working with such a talented cast. Ms. McCarthy, his partner in Theater Under the Stairs, is Estelle in "No Exit." She is "a fantastic actor, spot-on technically, wonderful to watch and to work with," he said.

Most recently, she appeared in "Side Man" in November at the Cape Rep Theatre, along with Rob Anderson, who is Joseph in "No Exit."
"Rob is incredible, goofy, a

little berserk," said Mr. Compton. "It is fun to watch him break down" during the course of the play, as he "leads the charge into crazy town."

Susan Winslow plays Inez, whom Mr. Compton describes as "a rare type of character." It is "incredibly fun to watch her build her character. She is magnetic on stage, perfect for detail work."

Stephen Coltin plays the valet. He is "uber-mysterious, kind of a creepy character. You can read the doom on his face."
Stage manager for the show is

Rose Webster, a 14-year-old with a strong interest in the theater. The daughter of a co-worker (when not directing, Mr. Compton works in a dental lab) had also worked with the "Medea."
"She is very enthusiastic, competent and professional kind of the third member of Theater Under the Stairs," Mr. Compton.

For more information to purchase tickets, visit tarts.org, or call 508-428-4404. The Cotuit Center for the Arts is at 4404 Route 28 in Cotuit.