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Theater in the raw

J City Theater's 'As Bees in Honey Drown'

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J City Theater's latest production, "As Bees in Honey Drown" by Douglas Carter Beane is a thrilling romp through the frothy intoxication of celebrity.

The show opened last Friday at the Brennan Courthouse in Jersey City and will be shown in conjunction with the Jersey City Artists Studio Tour.

Beane's award winning social satire tells the tale of socialite Alexa Vere de Vere (played by Sandy Cockrell) who is more a force of nature than human being.

Alexa has set her sights on the next new thing - which happens to be writer Evan Wyler (played by Aaron Simms), who having just finished a book is entering into his 15 minutes of fame.

Alexa promises Evan more than that - offering scripts, trips, parties and a whole new wardrobe to boot.

Advertisement **The plot thickens...**

Yet Evan may have gotten more than he imagined in his new found mentor when she not only leaves him - but leaves him with a pile of debt.

No longer completely naïve, Evan embarks on a mission to track down the slippery siren.

Yet the closer he seems, the further he gets from the truth. Who is the real Alexa Vere de Vere?

In Act Two, Evan meets other protégés of Alexa, yet none who are as outraged as the writer, who not only believed her, but believed he was in love with her.

He finds many artists have succumbed to her flair and flattery and vows to find her and make her pay if he can. Yet is Alexa merely just a skilled con artist or has something else forced her to become "a lady no better than she has to be, in a world considerably worse than it ought to be."

Minimalist theater

The play is set in modern day Manhattan and finds a suitable backdrop in the Brennan Courthouse, which was designed by Jersey City architect Hugh Roberts, who wanted the courthouse to be a "cathedral of justice."

The beautifully designed infrastructure, with marble floors and sweeping staircases lend itself to the production. It is easy to imagine expensive hotels and restaurants with such a backdrop.

There are only a few well-chosen props in this production, which allow the audience to focus on the energy of the actors and the unfolding charade.

Although the story moves a little slow in Act One, the action in Act Two more than makes up for it. The supporting cast (Audrey Amey, Kellis Carroll, Alicia Fitzgerald, Tom Gregory) all do a top-notch job juggling their many roles in the play.

It is a finely acted production, by a company that isn't afraid to tackle hot-topic issues - like their recent production of "Compression of a Tragedy" by Kevin Doyle in last month's Hudson County One-Act Festival. Working hard behind the scenes was Clay Cockrell (executive producer), Allen Hale (production assistant), and Sean McClafferty (stage manager).

A new theater

J City Theater was created last fall by the founding members of the group - Clay Cockrell, Sandy Harper Cockrell, and Kellis Carroll. The group opened with



A HONEY OF A SHOW – “As Bees in Honey Drown” presented by J City Theater runs from Sept. 28 to Oct. 14. On Friday and Saturday the show starts at 8 p.m. and on Sunday at 3 p.m. For more information, visit: www.jcity.org. Pictured from left: Alicia Fitzgerald, Audrey Amey, Tom Gregory, Sandy Cockrell, Aaron Simms, and Kellis Carroll.

"J.B." followed by "A Tuna Christmas."

Although new, J City Theater is a company to watch. Thus far, their choice of award winning material including compelling dramas and social satires has proven to be interesting to watch and worthy of conversation.

Last month's production of "Compression of a Tragedy" had more than one audience member reduced to tears.

While "Bees..." is more likely to leave the audience laughing, there is perhaps more than one disquieting moment waiting for an audience that sees familiar faces in the celebrity obsessed characters.

And...

"As Bees in Honey Drown" runs from Sept. 28 to Oct. 14. All performances will be held at the Brennan Courthouse, 583 Newark Ave. in Jersey City. On Friday and Saturday, the show starts at 8 p.m. and on Sunday the show starts at 3 p.m. On Sunday, Oct. 7 the show will be held at 7 p.m. instead of 3 p.m. due to the Jersey City Artists Studio Tour. The comedy runs just over two hours and includes one 15-minute intermission. The ticket cost is \$15 per person. Tickets can be purchased at: www.brownpapertickets.com or by calling (800) 838-3006. For more information on J City Theater, visit: www.jcity.org.

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