

10/30/2005

Tale of a call girl

Hudson Exploited Theatre production takes on NYC's Theater Row

Jessica Rosero
Reporter staff writer

"Love [is] for sale. What price would you pay for a trip to paradise?"

That is the question posed in the production *Jane Ho*, which was first brought to the stage of the Park Performing Arts Center by the Union City-based Hudson Exploited Theatre Company (HEXTC) in December of 2003.

Since its debut, *Jane Ho* has kept tongues wagging and will now light up New York City's The Lion at Theatre Row Studios beginning Nov. 4, with its controversial story about the life of a highly priced lady of the evening and the similarities she shares with the average populace when it comes to attaining commonly held desires.

The life and times of Jane Ho

Advertisement

Written by John Pallotta and directed by Arian Blanco, *Jane Ho* introduces the audience to the world of prostitution, but avoids the stereotypical standards society can attribute to that world. *Jane Ho*, played by Mikaela Kafka, is not different from the person sitting in the theater seat.



ALTER EGOS – Jane Ho's inner personalities, which reflect aspects of her character, are played by Daina Michelle Griffith, Heather Male, A.B. Lugo.

"*Jane Ho* is basically the story about the life and times of a high priced call girl," said Blanco. "It's about life choices."

"I felt such a connection with it right away, and the audience response [the first time] was just amazing," said Kafka. "It brings up questions in our own lives and it makes you think, which is why theater is really there."

The audience also spends the night with three other sex workers, played by Daina Michelle Griffith, Heather Male, A.B. Lugo, who are really just different personalities of the leading character, depicting aspects of her character. There is the southern belle that is Jane's tender, emotional side, the foreigner that is her analytical side, and the male Ho, her alter ego.

Then there is *Jane Ho*, linking the characters all together on a psychological journey into the "inner workings of life, the darkest desires of the human spirit, and the power of a mirror."

"The story revolves around *Jane Ho*, and [Pallotta] created four more people from her personality," said Blanco. "Physically, from the beginning of the play, [all four characters] are partially undressed, but emotionally their guards are up."

As the play progresses and *Jane Ho* begins to deal with her inner demons and reveal the course of how she came to be where she is, the characters start to dress.

"As the play goes on, the facades start to break down, so while [*Jane Ho*] is physically covering up, she is emotionally undressing herself," said Arian. "At the end of the play she is fully dressed [as is the rest of the cast]."

The audience comes to realize is that they have been watching *Jane Ho* get ready to meet with her powerful, high-profile clients. "We've been watching them get ready to go out and trick," said Blanco.

Inspiration for *Jane Ho*

Pallotta has been involved with theater, film, and television for over 20 years, and has written over a dozen plays including *How I Killed My Roommate* and *Got Away with It*, which had an eight-week run at the Producers Club in New York City, and *Vegas*, which was read at two venues in Chicago.

As a matter of fact, it was from Pallotta's knowledge of the entertainment industry that inspired the development of *Jane Ho*.

"[Prostitution] has been known in this industry to run rampant," said Pallotta.

"It is the oldest profession in the world, and it can be anybody," said Kafka.

For decades, especially for actresses who don't want to wait tables or work minimum wage jobs until their big break, prostitution has been a means to get by, and many stories have been written about it.

"Jane Ho for some reason was different and I didn't want it to be just another play," said Pallotta.

The premise for *Jane Ho* was based on these actors and actresses, who at one time or currently work in the profession and live in incredible condominiums in the city. For majority of his research, Pallotta regularly talked with an actress and call girl from Chelsea.

"They are the highest priced courtesans in the city with powerful men as clients," said Pallotta. "They kind of lead double lives, but they are also sharp business women."

As Pallotta probed into the underworld of these high priced call girls, he started to see they were the same as a girl working as an office secretary with similar daily routines, such as walking the dog.

"These are things a lot of us do, so I mixed [Jane Ho's] life with our lives," said Pallotta.

While Pallotta's production has been well received by critics and audiences, some of the girls of the trade have been less receptive. "A couple of call girls are upset, because what do I know about a prostitute?" said Pallotta.

Then there are others who have been captivated by the story just like other audiences, and are trying to bring the production to other venues.

Jane Ho also stars Liche Ariza, with original score by Andy Cohen, set and light design by Gregg Bellon, sound design by Joe DiSanzo.

Breaking new ground

The mission of HEXTC is to bring quality and affordable theater to both sides of the Hudson River. For the past 10 years, HEXTC has also given opportunities to local playwrights to produce their works for the 32nd Street Playhouse at the Park PAC, and have brought other professional productions from New York to the Park PAC, as well as Directors Labs to both sides of the river.

However, *Jane Ho* is first for HEXTC, because the full-scale production first developed at their Union City residency space will be brought to the New York stage.

"*Jane Ho* marks an exciting time for HEXTC," said Adrian Rodriguez, artistic director. "This process of nurturing, developing, and polishing new plays at our residency space in New Jersey and then bringing them to such a prestigious venue as Theatre Row signals an important step in legitimizing HEXTC's profile as a leading producer of new works."

Jane Ho can be seen at The Lion Theatre at Theatre Row Studios, 410 West 42nd St. (between Ninth and Dyer avenues), New York City, from Nov. 4 through Nov. 19.

Tickets are \$15 and can be ordered by calling Ticket Central at (212) 279-4200 or visiting www.ticketcentral.com.

Jessica Rosero can be reached at jrosero@hudsonreporter.com

©*The Hudson Reporter 2005*