



Phizzical Productions present

The Maids

When the mistress is away, the maids will play

Written by **Jean Genet**

A new translation by **Neil Bartlett**

Directed & designed by **Sâmir Bhamra**

Touring from: **20 February – 9 May 2009**

Jean Genet's notorious first play takes elements of the thriller and subverts them with disturbing games of language, transgression and transformation.

A poisoned teacup, a mysterious 'Monsieur', a profusion of flowers and two sisters caught up in a fantasy of conspiracy and murder. When left alone in the house, Claire and Solange Lemerancier indulge in secret rituals of hatred and revenge, directed against their wealthy employer. They both love and hate their mistress and are drawn daily to act out fantasies of power and submission. Will the game ever reach its conclusion and with what consequences?

Jean Genet was a leading figure in the avant-garde theatre movement and this play is considered to be a powerful work in the canon of modern drama. This production transposes the tale to 19th century India demonstrating the politics of power and class, and where the stylistic and expressionistic nuances lend themselves to the illusory world inhabited by the maids.

This production of *The Maids* directed by **Sâmir Bhamra** features a cast of male and female actors rotating performances on an alternate or weekly basis. Although, the first performance of *The Maids* had a female cast, Jean Genet's long time friend and supporter, Jean Paul Sartre, states that Genet's intention was always for the production to feature young men playing women, because female actors did not need to "play" women. They naturally have a softness in their voice, skin and demeanour. He wanted the actors to appear "de-realised" – and to create this artificial state, he wanted to eliminate nature i.e. soften a broken voice, cover-up the blue/green tones of a beard, soften the hard muscles to imagine a world momentarily without women.

Bhamra, on the other hand wants to understand how different genders play with the roles – how far are they willing to stretch the imaginary world.

"This way, I can present something beautiful and bizarre/grotesque – because this is the world we live in. Everything around us is disguised better, we hide our prejudices better. Women in our world today work hard, play hard, and make hard decisions. They do the work of a man, and often better than a man. Where does this leave the man? Men seem to searching for their new identity. We've seen 'the sensitive man', 'the metro-sexual' and it is becoming more acceptable to be aware and present their feminine side. As a whole, there has been a shift – women are becoming more masculine and men are becoming more feminine – and that for me – is both beautiful and bizarre."

www.phizzical.com

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Sâmir Bhamra, was born in Nairobi, Kenya, his recent work includes the Pulitzer Prize nominated play *A Perfect Ganesh* written by Terrence McNally, *Romeo + Laila* and *Precious Bazaar* (nominated for a Windrush Arts Award).

For this production, Bhamra has also designed the set, the costumes, the lighting and the sound.

The Maids has been made possible by arrangement with Rosica-Colin and The Agency London. Suitable for 15+

The male cast features Jeremy Williams (theatre: *Counterfeit Skin*, *The Maids RSC's Henry V*), Robby Khela (music: *BBC Unsung finalist*, *Indian Idol 4*, theatre: *What You Fancy*,) and Pritesh Chauhan (theatre: *Oliver Twist*, *West Side Story*, *What You Fancy*).

The female cast comprises Zafreen (films: *Brick Lane*, *Symmetry of Love*, theatre: Tara Arts *Sonata*), Bhavika Mistry (theatre: *Precious Bazaar*, *Romeo+Laila*, *What You Fancy*) and Kanira Shah (film: *Fashion*, theatre: *Murder On The Menu*)

The Maids tours the UK from 20 Feb – 9 May to the following venues 21- 21 Feb **Y Theatre**, Leicester; 25 Feb – 7 March, **Watermans**, London ; 8 March **Harrow Arts Centre**; 10 March **Byre Theatre**, Fife; Tues 17 March, **Arena Theatre**, Wolverhampton; Thurs 19 March **Stahl Theatre**, Oundle; 26 – 26 March, **Rich Mix** London; 31 March **Wilde Theatre**, Bracknell & Sun 9 May **Canolfan Ucheldre Centre**, Holyhead

For full listings, cast biographies, images and any other information please contact: Suman on 07930 101894 or visit www.phizzical.com and www.watermans.org.uk

TOUR

The show will be performed on **male** and **female** actors on alternate nights.

Friday 20 - Saturday 21 February 8 pm

THE Y 7 East Street, Leicester LE1 6EY

0116 255 7066

£8 (£5 concessions) www.ytheatre.co.uk

Wednesday 25 – Saturday 28 February & **Thursday 5 – Saturday 7** March 7.45 pm

WATERMANS 40 High Street, Brentford TW8 0DS

020 8232 1010

Tickets: £12 (£10 concessions) www.watermans.org.uk

Sunday 8 March 7.30 pm

HARROW ARTS CENTRE Uxbridge Road, Hatch End HA5 4EA

020 8416 8989

£10 (£8 concessions) www.harrowarts.com

Tuesday 10 March 7.30 pm

BYRE THEATRE Abbey Street, St. Andrews, Fife KY16 9LA

01334 475000

£14 (£12 concessions and £8 students) www.byretheatre.com

Tuesday 17 March 7.30 pm

ARENA THEATRE Wulfruna Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1SE

01902 321 321

£8 (£6 concessions) www.arenatheatre.info

Thursday 19 March 7.45 pm

STAHL THEATRE West Street, Oundle PE8 4EJ

01832 273930

£9 www.oundleschool.org.uk

Thursday 26 - Friday 27 March 7.30 pm

RICH MIX 35-47 Bethnal Green Road, London E1 6LA

020 7613 7498

£12 (£10 concessions) www.richmix.org.uk

Tuesday 31 March 7.30 pm

WILDE THEATRE South Hill Park, Ringmead, Bracknell, RG12 7PA

01344 484123

£12, (£11 concessions, £10 members, £8 under 21s) www.southhillpark.org.uk

Saturday 9 May 7.30 pm

CANOLFAN UCHELDRE CENTRE Millbank, Holyhead LL65 1TE

01407 763361

£10, (£8 concessions) www.ucheldre.org

For more information contact: Sâmir Bhamra on press@phizzical.com or telephone 07958 484858 / 0116 210 2377. For images: <http://www.phizzical.com/themaids/press.htm> or contact Sâmir.

Writer: JEAN GENET

Jean Genet was born on December 19, 1910, the illegitimate son of a Parisian prostitute, and orphaned seven months later. At the age of ten, he was accused of stealing. Although innocent but having been described as a thief, the young boy resolved to be a thief. "Thus," wrote Genet, "I decisively repudiated a world that had repudiated me." At the age of thirteen, after being a ward of the state, he began a life of crime and adventure. From 15 to 18 Genet was in the Mettray penitentiary, a place of hard labour, where a code of love, honour, gesture and justice was enforced by the inmates, and where his sexual awakening occurred. He then joined the French Foreign Legion in Syria. He deserted and spent more periods in prison living by petty theft, begging, and homosexual prostitution. By the age of 23, Genet was living in Spain, sleeping with a one-armed pimp, lice-ridden and begging - a period which became the basis for *The Thief's Journal*, his record of a journey, in which no aspect of suffering, sordidness, and degradation was spared him.

Between 1930 and 1940, he wandered throughout Europe and he eventually, he found himself in Hitler's Germany where he felt strangely out of place. "*I had a feeling of being in a camp of organized bandits. This is a nation of thieves, I felt. If I steal here, I accomplish no special act that could help me to realize myself. I merely obey the habitual order of things. I do not destroy it.*"

At age 32, while in prison, he started writing his first manuscript, *Our Lady of the Flowers*. It was discovered and destroyed. Genet rewrote it from memory. This handwritten manuscript was smuggled out of his cell and eventually came to the attention of Cocteau and Sartre, who lobbied vigorously for a pardon from a life-sentence. More than forty intellectuals and artists petitioned the French government on Genet's behalf.

After five novels, and then silence for several years, Genet re-emerged as a playwright. He wrote a number of theatrical pieces which further established his success, beginning with the production of *The Maids*, and followed by the other classic plays: *The Blacks*, *The Balcony*, and *The Screens*. Genet believed the theatre should be an incendiary event, and was precise about how his works should be produced. Genet wrote of the gay world, without apology or explanation, revealing beauty in the harsh world in which his characters lived loved and died. He deeply felt a sense of solidarity with thieves, and society's dispossessed. In later life, Genet championed the causes of the Black Panthers in the United States and Palestinian soldiers in Jordan and Lebanon. His final work, *Prisoner of Love*, is a record of his years spent with these two groups. He died on April 15th 1986.

Translator: NEIL BARTLETT

Neil was an early member of *Complicité*, and has directed at the Royal National Theatre, the Royal Court, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Goodman Theatre Chicago, and the American Repertory Theater in Boston. From 1994 to 2005 he was the Artistic Director of the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith where his work included collaborations with *Improbable* and Robert Lepage as well as 27 classical plays and 5 Christmas shows. His other two adaptations of Dickens' work (*OLIVER TWIST* and *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*) have been widely performed throughout Britain and North America. His adaptations as well as his translations of Genet, Kleist, Labiche, Marivaux, Molière and Racine are all published by Oberon books. Most recently Neil has directed *THE MAIDS* for the Brighton Festival with Kathryn Hunter, *THE PIANIST* at the Manchester International Festival, and seen publication of his third novel *SKIN LANE*.

Director: SÂMIR BHAMRA

Sâmir Bhamra is the artistic director and founder of Phizzical Productions. He wrote and directed the inaugural production, *Precious Bazaar*, after creating *BollyIdol*, a programme designed to nurture and develop young people from theatre – from which the cast of the show was discovered.

A trained dancer, he has judged for Sony TV's *Boogie Woogie* dance competition and has choreographed music videos for Bally Sagoo and Ishq Records, including the smashing single *Aap Ki Nazron Ne Samjha*. In 2006, he was an artist in residence at Leicester Theatre Trust where he had the opportunity to travel to Philadelphia for directors-lab to explore *A Perfect Ganesh*. In 2007, he participated in the Design Direct course run by Tamasha to explore *A Yearning*, inspired from Lorca's *Yerma*. He choreographed the *Golden Girl: Helen* tribute show at New Players Theatre for Tongues on Fire 2007 festival. His directorial credits include: *Precious Bazaar* (2004-2005), *Romeo + Laila* (2006), and *A Perfect Ganesh* (2008). He has also produced *What You Fancy* (2007) and *Retailiation* (2007).

Sâmîr Bhamra has recently completed writing his second production, *Big B - The Musical* which is inspired from the screen persona of the legendary Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan and is expected to open in October 2009.

Claire: BHAVIKA MISTRY theatre credits include playing Mohini in the national and international tour of 'What You Fancy', Jelina in 'Romeo and Laila' and Roshni in the national tour of 'Precious Bazaar'. Having been trained in the dance form Kathak by Nayana Whittaker of Nrityakala Dance School as well as other styles of dance, her dancing credits include performances nationally with various groups as well as stars such as Shah Rukh Khan, 'Golden Girl' Helen, Vivek Oberoi, Karishma Kapoor, Anil Kapoor and many more.

Her international dancing credits include performing in Norway at the Film Festival, Pakistan and in Dubai performing for the Sheikh. Her television and film credits include 'Big B Musical' on Sony TV's *Boogie Woogie* and compeering the *Boogie Woogie* UK final Contest Live for Sony TV as well as presenting weekly shows for Sony TV. She has also won a number of modeling competitions and has starred in a various music videos.

Madame: KANIRA SHAH decided in March 2008 to give up her job in finance to pursue her dream- acting. Though she has an engineering background, she was always interested in the performing arts. She grew up in Antwerp, Belgium, where she participated in various dancing competitions and featured in music videos. While at school she also obtained a Grade 8 Solo Piano certificate from Trinity College of Music. She took part in various university productions and joined an evening acting course at the Arts Educational School while she was studying. She also attended an intensive Method Acting course at the Method Centre in London and recently spent 9 months in India concentrating on acting and modelling. Her theatre credits include Arlene in "Murder on the Menu"; she helped choreograph the Belgian play "Terug Normaal" and was in the adaptation of 12th Night for Phizzical Productions as Olivia.

She featured in the Bollywood movie "Fashion" directed by Madhur Bhandarkar and various TV commercials (7up, Brylcreem, Mazaa and Yamaha). She was also photographed for editorials in L'Officiel, Elle, Cosmopolitan, Marie-Claire and Asiana, and participated in various fashion shows (M.A.C., GC Watches, Ford, Neeta Lulla, Raffles Design, Retail Jewellery Awards).

Solange: ZAFREEN received praiseworthy reviews from BBC Cambridgeshire and The Stage for playing the lead in Phizzical Productions's first play 'Precious Bazaar'. Zafreen went on to playing the supporting role of Hasina in the award winning film, 'Brick Lane'. Her second feature film is currently in post-production called 'Symmetry of Love' where she plays Gita. She presented a series for the Discovery Channel as the Government's initiative to promote British science and technology to Indian entrepreneurs.

She has woked with Tara Arts when she played Ria in Mukesh Elcuncwar's acclaimed play, 'Sonata'. Zafreen has also appeared in commercials such as X-Box and Energy Saving. Zafreen is

still dancing and choreographing. She is currently in collaboration with Club Asia Radio station to bring a stage show. She will always treasure Mrs Bally Sagoo's comment "You're the best Asian female dancer I have seen".

Madame: PRITESH CHAUHAN started his performing arts journey as a hip hop dancer over five years ago and since has ventured into other dance styles, entertaining all over the UK and most recently returning from an international project in Dubai.

As well as teaching dance, Pritesh has pursued a strong interest in acting. His theatre credits include various roles in the national tour of Precious Bazaar over two years, 'Sanjay' in Shaadi Ke Rang, musicals Oliver Twist and West Side Story. He was in the devised adaptation of Shakespeare's Othello, but the turning point in his acting career took place in 'What You Fancy' where he played the comic diva 'Akash', both on the national and international tour.

Pritesh has also written and sang songs in stage in some of the above plays, and is in the process of writing his first musical theatre production.

Claire: ROBBY KHELA is a former student at John Robert Powers School of Acting, and graduated in BA (Hons) English and Dramam from Brunel University. He landed his first acting role with Phizzical Productions in 'What you Fancy'. The play was an adaptation of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night and Robby played the role of 'Sunny' (Sebastian). By passion Robby is a trained singer, who started off in a mixed vocal group before he took the leap for acting and a solo singing career. During this time he worked with the likes of Blue, Girls Aloud, So Solid Crew and Lamar whilst they were on tour. Robby Khela has worked with established producers such as Rishi Rich, Ignorants, Big Pockets and Max Matin's Production company (Sweden).

He was also a Finalist in BBC Asian Network's 'Unsung' Competition and has recently returned from Indian Idol 4 after being selected by famous bollywood personalities Anu Malik and Javed Akhtar to represent the UK in Mumbai. Robby Khela is currently creating a Demo CD with Play Recording Studios in London in hopes to land a management/recording contract and is enjoying his time collaborating with various producers.

Solange: JEREMY WILLIAMS graduated in 2005 from the University of Hull. He made his actor/writer debut in 'Poppycock!' at the Edinburgh Festival 2005. He is currently working on his first full length play 'Three Kisses?'. He also writes for D'Ash magazine, an off shoot of the Jerusalem Post. Theatre credits include Joey in Road (UPs), Luke in Counterfeit Skin (JC Theatre), Supernumery in Henry V (RSC), Claire in The Maids (Struts & Frets), Prince Charming in Cinderella (Lakeland Productions), Claire in The Maids (Gist), Wishi Washi in Aladdin (P4M), Narrator in Silent Voice (PPTP), Danceney in Les Liaisons Dangereuses (Struts & Frets), Moon in Blood Wedding (Struts & Frets), Apollo in The Writer (Uncle Sids), Lester in Magic Of Christmas (Blue Inc.), Annie (Ugly Sister) in Cinderella (Lakeland Productions), Sebastian in Twelfth Night (Struts & Frets).

Film, Theatre and Radio credits include Harris in Image Of Madness (Brown Dog Productions), Alistair Devlin in Kinky Hair (BBC Radio WM), Karl in Pizza For One (Keep It Little), Joshua in The Man Of Great Stature (BBC Shropshire), Alex in Coming Home (Videodrome), Joe in Deliver Me (Anthem Films), 1986 Man in World Cup 2006 Ident (New Moon). He also presented his own weekly show on London's Jcom, an arts review show called J.Arts.

Modelling work has included shoots for Paul Schnaars, David Viney, Andrew Bainbridge, Don Schwager and Andrew Moscardo-Parker. He has recently done a poster shoot for Miller Beer, Ireland (photography by Garry Simpson, Vue US). In 2006 he was heavily featured in the University of Hull.