

MONSTROUS REGIMENT PRESENTS

MY SISTER IN THIS HOUSE

by
WENDY KESSELMAN

directed by
NANCY MECKLER



MY SISTER IN THIS HOUSE

by Wendy Kesselman

In the summer of 1930, in Le Mans, France, two sisters were placed as servants in the Danzard household. They passed as twins, had identical scars on their wrists and shared a bed. They were devoted to each other.

In the autumn of 1933, Madame Danzard and her daughter were found, brutally murdered, on the stairs to the servants' quarters.

MY SISTER IN THIS HOUSE is based on an historical incident whose solitary and bizarre violence shocked French bourgeois society and inspired Genet's 'The Maids'. It is a remarkable play about oppression, suppressed emotion, and the bonds of sisterhood.

MY SISTER IN THIS HOUSE has been performed widely in the United States - where it won the 1981 Susan Smith Blackburn prize - but never before in this country. Wendy Kesselman has also won the 1980 Playbill Award, four 'Ascaph' awards for musical theatre and both the Guggenheim and McKnight fellowships.

Monstrous Regiment are now booking the tour for 'My Sister In This House' - which will be directed by Nancy Meckler - for Spring 1987. The show costs £450 per performance, and Sandy Bailey will be happy to give you further details on 01-247 2398.

Presented by

**MONSTROUS
REGIMENT**

ARTS GUARDIAN

FESTIVAL

Michael Billington reports on some surprises among the new plays at Louisville, Kentucky

I hope we also hear more about a totally contrasted piece of mood theatre: *My Sister In This House* by Wendy Kesselman. This deals with a famous French crime that took place in Le Mans in 1933 when two sisters who worked as serving-maids murdered their employer and her daughter.

Ms Kesselman came across it when reading Janet Flanner's *Paris Was Yesterday*. Ironically, Ms Flanner used to write for the *New Yorker* under the name "Genet"; and it was, of course, Jean Genet, who capitalised on the same story in *The Maids*.

Genet used the incident for a ritualistic study of power. Ms Kesselman, who has obsessively studied every detail of the case, is far more interested in the repressive atmosphere of the house and of Le Mans itself; and her triumphant achievement is to make the murder seem theatrically inevitable.

The two women are con-

vent-reared, domestically exploited and sexually incestuous. In Jon Jory's brilliant production, in which light seems to filter with reluctance through Paul Owen's dark-shuttered set they scuttle about the house like silent mice. Only in their bedroom, where even their combing of each other's hair acquires an erotic impulse, do they surge into life, and it is when they are prematurely interrupted in their bedroom games that they instinctively kill.

THE GUARDIAN

FRIDAY 27 MARCH 1981

'My Sister' is subtle, horrifying & tender

By MARILYN
STASIO

WENDY Kesselman has written a play of horrifying beauty in *My Sister in This House* (at the Second Stage, 23 W. 73d St.). It is a subtle, almost tender study of four lonely women whose strange and complex relationship ends in an outrage of violence.

Based on the same 1930s French murder case that inspired Genet's *The Maids*, the play observes the interlocking obsessions of a house-proud woman and her "perfect" maid. For all its psychological penetration, Kesselman's observations are not unsympathetic as she examines these driven souls and the two weaker women who become swept up in their obsessions.

In the understated, almost austere production directed by Inverna Lockpez and Carole Rothman (and gorgeously designed by Jim Clayburgh and Arden Fingerhut), the upper-class mother and daughter played so deftly by Beverly May and Brenda Currin are seen as prisoners of their stultifying way of life. So are the two servant sisters so meticulously drawn by Elizabeth McGovern and especially by Lisa Banes, ~~are seen~~ to be victims of theirs.

The production is not without unsightly seams; some emotional beats are missing in the maids' transition from loneliness to murderous desperation. But it is still a thoughtful and haunting beauty of a play.

NEW YORK POST

FRIDAY 27 NOVEMBER 1981

The following unofficial photographs of Christine and Lea, were obtained by the writer during her lengthy research into this shocking incident:-

PHOTOGRAPH ONE

Christine and Lea, two years before the murder.

PHOTOGRAPH TWO

Lea, 2 hours after the murder of Madame Danzard and her daughter.

PHOTOGRAPH THREE

Christine, 2 hours after the murder of Madame Danzard and her daughter.

PHOTOGRAPH FOUR

Christine and Lea, during their trial.







