



Picture: IAN TURNER

Maids and mistress: Kerry Fox, Niamh Cusack and Josette Simon

Murder and passion return with Genet's Maids of dishonour

MURDER, sex and religion. The mix promises to be as potent as ever when Jean Genet's rarely performed little shearer *The Maids* is revived at the Donmar Warehouse next week. The new production by Irishman John Crowley, younger brother of the prolific theatre designer Bob Crowley, brings together three of Britain's finest young actresses.

Josette Simon plays "Our Lady", whose death is plotted by her two maids, Niamh Cusack and Kerry Fox — making her West End debut after enjoying success in films like *Shallow Grave*.

While their mistress is out, the two maids take it in turn to dress up in her gowns, one to play the tormenting mistress, the other the degraded maid. Thus they act out their envy, hatred and perverse love of servitude in a manner that has strong lesbian overtones.

"I have got a wonderful cast," said Crowley. "They are fantastic — three very different actresses who are connecting and creating a very exciting energy between them."

It is suggested that the homosexual Genet, who drew on his own experiences of low life as beggar, thief and male prostitute, wanted the roles played by

by **ROBIN STRINGER**
Arts Correspondent

official love," said Crowley, "but it was one he later contradicted in a letter to a friend."

Crowley, who is also making his West End directorial debut after his acclaimed National Theatre work, is surprised *The Maids* is so rarely attempted. The last major production in London was in 1974 at Greenwich, when Glenda Jackson and Susannah York were the Maids to Vivien Merchant's mistress.

"I think it's Genet's best play and his most accessible," said Crowley, who responds to the Catholic Genet's "continuing desire to blaspheme and subvert".

He said: "I love the mix of murder, sex and religion in the middle of it. It is so voyeuristic that you don't have to go for a high-blown style of performance. It's like eavesdropping."

Maids Stringer Preview Standard



Clipped By:

ianlharris

Tue, Nov 15, 2022