

TheRep, Albany, NY

Seared. by Theresa Rebeck. Directed by Margaret E. Hall
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“There are an infinite number of doors you can open with butter.”

Butter, Scallops, Salman, Short Ribs: these are the stars in Theresa Rebeck’s fine play, “Seared” now on stage in Albany at theRep in a beautiful production acted by a talented cast. Set in a kitchen, a practical set designed by Brian Prather, in a boutique restaurant in Park Slope, Brooklyn, it deals with a talented, temperamental chef named Harry, his partner in the business, Mike, their waiter/apprentice Rodney, and a “consultant” named Emily who brings as many problems as she solves. The play is so realistic that Harry and Rodney actually cook the food that is discussed in the play. They cook on Prather’s set and you can actually smell the food as it is prepared. You won’t see many plays that offer aromas like these.



Kyle Cameron, Rin Allen, Caesar Samayoa, Jovan Davis; Photo: Kevin Montano

The show’s budget must include an incredible clean-up line for the dishes, pans, pots, tools, costume pieces, and food garbage. Having seen the original production in Williamstown a few years ago I never anticipated another due to the obvious expenses, but theRep never shies away from a challenge and here we are again. Did you ever wonder what goes on behind the scene in a restaurant? This play will answer that question overwhelmingly. You’ll never ask that question again.



Rin Allen; Photo: Kevin Montano

In addition to the chef's agenda and need, Emily has her own agenda and her own needs. Her relationship to Mike is obvious, but her new-found relationship to Harry is a difficult one that develops over time. Rin Allen gives Emily an intensity that is almost as remarkable as the seared salmon with an exotic sauce that assumes an erotic sensibility in no time at all. Allen is overwhelming as Emily, almost too much to take at first, but ultimately an integral part of this meal in the making. Her Emily is as tough as red meat, as sweet as mousse and as deliberate as wilted spinach salad. She dominates the play in a tasteful way.

Kyle Cameron's Mike is sometimes as hard for the audience to take as he is for Harry. He is an angry man whose fouled friendship can't compete with the scallop dish Harry refuses to make. Cameron is often too loud for the restaurant's kitchen, too harsh and too unfriendly in this difficult and complex role. We rarely see the friend he is supposed to be and never even the lover that attracts Emily. He is a bit too one-tone for me.

His friend and partner, Chef Harry, is a rigid, principled man who won't budge an inch when it comes to food or principles. Caesar Samayoa plays him almost as one-toned as Cameron plays Mike. Their mixture of ambivalence, hostility and passions leaves the definite impression of lovers who cannot reconcile after one of them has cheated in the relationship. Samayoa has been trained well for his role as a superior chef and his cooking is as believable as his temper. Gabi Bazinet Douglas, the show's food designer/safety manager has done well training him to plate Harry's inventions and presumably how to handle knives, pans and so on. Samayoa comes off as a man who should be in a kitchen rather than on a stage. It is a very realistic portrayal/



Caesar Samayoa; Photo: Kevin Montano

But the finest performance is given by Jovan Davis as Rodney, the waiter, who serves as an apprentice to the chef. With the exception of his costumes which are too informal even for Brooklyn Davis doesn't have a single misstep in this play. My only complaint is his final moments in the play when a contrite Harry rejoins his companions and needs a single gesture of acceptance which I didn't see him get. Rodney is the ideal character for such a moment, but this is denied us in Margaret E. Hall's otherwise fine direction of the play.

Andrea Adamczyk has designed great costumes for Emily, fine costumes for Mike and Harry and seemingly the wrong costumes for Rodney. The quirky lighting design by Travis McHale includes specials for scene changes, which are complex, and more realistic looks for the play's scenes. Jeffrey Salerno's sound design failed in the opening scene of the play when the noise of people in the restaurant would pop in when the connecting door opened and always disappeared before the door could close.



Kyle Cameron, Rin Allen, Jovan Davis, Caesar Samayoa; Photo: Kevin Montano

This unusual play is worth a look. You learn so much about the inner workings of a fine restaurant and the inner workings of a master chef. Your program also gives you access to the recipes in the play. Overall, there is the fine play and excellent players who make this show one of the best of this season.

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Seared plays at Capital Rep, 251 North Pearl Street, Albany, New York through October 6. For information and tickets go to CAPITALREP.OR or call 518-346-6204.