



One Flea Spare

By Naomi Wallace

Directed by Michole Biancosino

At Metro Cafe to Nov. 19

I spent the better part of my weekend seeing theater in nontheatrical spaces, an exercise I almost always enjoy. There's definitely something to that three-planks-and-a-passion impulse that infects itinerant troupes. And whatever it is, it's out in full force in the high-ceilinged, bar-hugging front room at the Metro Cafe, where the beligerently youthful Project Y is staging Naomi Wallace's *One Flea Spare*, a cautionary tale about plague mentality.

Though Wallace writes of a group of strangers left behind to die during the 1665 pestilence, in which a panicked British aristocracy locked London's gates from the outside when it fled to the country, she clearly wants audiences to think of a more contemporary plague. Why else would her characters spend so much of their time chattering on about body fluids and sex?

And chatter they do, from the moment a filthy sailor breaks into a wealthy couple's house and pisses into a fine vase. The couple is aghast, but they're not nearly as shockable as they first appear. Hubby turns out to have an unseemly interest in what sailors do with themselves at sea when there are no ladies present, and Wifey (who is hiding a dark secret under her long white gloves and frilly gowns) can't get her mind off the oozing sore in the sailor's side. An adolescent girl has also dropped by to torment everyone with truth-telling and to have her toes sucked by a horny guard (who sometimes wears a lit barbecue grill on his head).

There is, in short, no paucity of incident in *One Flea Spare*. Nor can the evening be called short on vivid verbiage; "Sparrows fall dead from the skies into the hands of beggars" is a pretty typical locution. Whether all this blue activity and purple prose add up to much is an open question, but it's certainly arresting in Michole Biancosino's resourceful staging. She's aided by an adept cast and clever design work that would be even more clever if it were just a tad sparer.

In light of the fact that several of Project Y's founders got their start with Potomac Theatre Project (PTP), it's intriguing that Wallace's stylistic flourishes so resemble those of political British dramatist and poet Howard

Barker, whose ferocious diatribes *No End of Blame*, *Scenes From an Execution*, and *The Castle* were all championed locally by PTP. Though Wallace hails from Kentucky, her work is also better known in Britain than here. Project Y could do worse in its future seasons than to adopt the same sort of proprietary attitude toward her work that PTP did toward Barker's, and try to correct that situation.



Poxy Mama:
*One Flea
Spare*