

CRITICS

THEATER REVIEW

Sexual Tension Along the Jersey Shore

By JASON ZINOMAN

Winter Miller's "The Penetration Play," an erotically charged comedy about the flexibility of sexual identity at Mint Space in Manhattan, is produced by 13P, a collective of playwrights who decided to stop complaining about the painfully drawn-out development process for new plays and do something about it.

Tired of the workshops and readings that can drag on for months or even years, these playwrights chose to produce their own work. Their slogan says it all: "We don't develop plays. (We do them)."

Set during the last weekend of summer in a tastefully decorated house on the Jersey Shore, this provocative and flawed work by Ms. Miller, a researcher at The New York Times, begins when Rain (Mandy Siegfried) and Ashley (Mia Barron), best friends in their 20's, complete an exhausting run.

Rain is a lesbian who specializes in seducing straight women, and Ashley is a straight woman dating a somewhat bland man. It's a recipe for sexual tension, and Ms. Miller plays it for all it's worth. The quick-witted women know each other so well that they seem to speak in their own irony-drenched language.

"The Penetration Play" runs through Dec. 11 at Mint Space, 311 West 43rd Street, Clinton.



Carol Rosegg

Kathryn Grody, left, and Mandy Siegfried in "The Penetration Play."

'The Penetration Play'

Mint Space

At its best, the cracklingly funny dialogue summons up the feel of a raunchy gossip session that includes an uncomfortable, almost violent game of one-upmanship.

But like Ashley, the play is something of a tease. The lively, assured tone disappears in the next scene when Ashley's mother, Maggie (Kathryn Grody), enters the picture. Though the younger women's lines

were boiling over with subtext, this lonely housewife says exactly what's on her mind and often in portentously poetic speeches.

As with so many emerging playwrights, Ms. Miller's talent for dialogue exceeds her plotting facility. A shocking, if predictable, twist is never convincingly integrated into the story, and Rain, despite an irresistibly seductive performance by Ms. Siegfried, turns into something of a nasty sexual predator out of a Hollywood movie. As for the badly over-written conclusion, well, it could at least use a little more development.