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Jewel Thieves!

September 19th, 2007 - October 7th, 2007

The Turtle's Shell Theater
300 W 43rd St. 4th Floor

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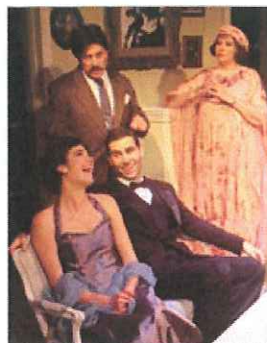
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Jewel Thieves!

Posted September 27, 2007, 11 PM

Jewel Thieves!, the newest production from The TSP Artists' Platform, is an ambitious homage to the classic clever comedies of the 1930s. Written and directed by Norman Beim, *Jewel Thieves!* takes its audience on a plotting, farcical and—in the end—surprising ride through the lives of four quirky characters whose identities and ambitions may or may not be as ingenuous as they present themselves from their deceitful outset.



Marnie Klar and Adam Raynen (seated) and Davis Hall and Gerriane Raphael (standing) in *Jewel Thieves!*

As the story starts, an aging actress named Gloria Desmond (Gerriane Raphael) has invited a mysterious stranger named Harold Busby (Davis Hall) to her country house, where he then meets an enigmatic butler (Adam Raynen) and a young countess (Marnie Klar). From the moment the lights rise, something is clearly awry, and scene by scene it's revealed that each character is lying in one way or another. Beim makes no effort to mask this in his script, and allows his audience to revel in deciphering each situation as it unfolds. As the title insinuates, someone—or, perhaps, some two—holds an agenda for the hostess' priceless bejeweled necklace. But who? As the play reminds us, "there's an honor amongst thieves," and in this play the thieves are less honorable as they are appropriately flawed, foppish and foolhardy. It's not until Act II that the story explodes with pace and discovery, and the characters spin themselves into a

joyful whirl, revealing much of what Beim's strong set-up has established, with an expected "payoff" at the very end.

Gerriane Raphael, clearly a seasoned Broadway veteran, does a superb job at commanding the stage. Her portrayal of Gloria Desmond is elegant and steady; she embodies her

character with grace and expert timing. Marnie Klar (Lady Lynne Fortescue) is delightfully deceptive as the countess. Not only does she look the period, but does a skillful job at embodying it as well, and succeeds in making this scheming young countess an absolute joy to watch.

With its consistent wordplay and witty one-liners, playwright Beim proves that he has a definite command of language unusual for those writing for the twenty-first century stage. *Jewel Thieves!* is impeccably structured, "well-made" in the way of the plays of the mid-twentieth century, when an audience came to the theater to listen.



Davis Hall and Gerriane Raphael

The production design for *Jewel Thieves!* is nothing short of transcending. The audience is immediately welcomed into this world by Ryan Scott's charming, sensible set, which reflects the period with an expert combination of quality and style. Scott has managed to incorporate some subtly exquisite detail into his design, such as a chair molding on the light lemon walls, and the blossoming rose bushes which can be viewed through the living room's serviceable French doors. Lisa Weinshrott and Michael Kimmel's lighting design evokes an expertise in its simplicity, creating the perfect early morning to midnight mood. Sound designer Roman Battaglia aids the audience on its journey with a farcical and (appropriately) foreboding over-the-top score and A. Christina Gianinni's costume design evokes the perfect blend of richness and era with streamlined, quality costumes that are colorful, inventive and detailed. All of these elements perfectly complement TSP's adorable and intimate proscenium venue.

For TSP Artists' Platform to chose a play like *Jewel Thieves!* is an encouraging affirmation for the future of New York City theater. Even for those who aren't familiar with the screwball comedies of days of old, *Jewel Thieves!* is a fantastic example of a fun "whodunnit," and an admirable throwback to the theater of suspense and surprise.

Written for United Stages by Liza Lentini, contributing columnist.