

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Play Examines Puritanical Ways

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Contributing Writer

An accomplished company ranging from moppets to Equity actors last week surmounted a prankish sound system and the

unforgiving vaults and surfaces of St. Peter's by the Sea sanctuary to premiere a provocative glimpse of the repressive Puritan church of the colonies.

"Satan Amongst Us," the story of Anne Marbury Hutchinson in the Massachusetts Bay colony, brought the principals of that episode alive through the warmth and conviction playwright Myla Lichtman-Fields invested in their lines. The two-act drama became chillingly credible under the sensitive command of director Kate Higgins.

Disdaining the clergy's warning to curb her view that grace more than works leads to salvation, Anne Hutchinson, convincingly played by Carol Ketay, continues her private discussions with a growing company of followers.

She insists that God is "within every creature, Puritan and heathen alike. These are not Anne Hutchinson's addlebrained notions but the teachings of Jesus, written down plainly for all to see."

An unseen adversary, John Winthrop, is heard stomping out during one of her discourses, and her approaching ordeal with clergy and magistrates is sensed.

Given to fevers and hallucinations during a false pregnancy after birthing 14, Anne relies upon the earthy ministrations of hump-backed midwife Goody Hawkins, masterly played by veteran character actress Rose Malin. Goody enters down a spotlight aisle past hushed pews, hawking her malodorous salves and potions and spouting cajolery and insults at every step.

"Since I be tending my dearest friend Anne here, and of me life, they're linking me with devil trafficking and witchcraft," she rasps in muted Cockney. "She keeps telling me to trust in Lord Jesus, but he's been letting 'em burn an awful lot of gentlewomen in Nan's me over in Salem."

On a snowy day Anne comes to comfort friend Mary Dyer (Valerie Stanton) in stocks for bearing a deformed child, Mary

pleads with Anne, who warms her frigid lips with tea, warns Anne to stay away lest she worsen her case.

Faith Hutchinson (Mickie Bolling-Burke) turns against her mother. "A woman's place is first and foremost in her home beside her family—to serve her husband and care for her children. Our church, in its wisdom, does not permit its women to enter the ministry."

Elizabeth Cotton (Jeni Dickinson) accuses Anne of being drawn from England to Massachusetts not by the scriptures but by interest in her husband, John Cotton. "Wherever Anne has gone, John has followed. You must put an end to this perilous connection."

Called before her accusers, Anne Hutchinson rejects some 28 charges, most based upon Biblical points she discussed with them in confidence. Her defense ignored, black-hatted Reverend Wilson, played by producer Stuart Brown, thunders out her banishment.

"In the name of Christ, I do deliver thee up to Satan. So that none of Satan's children shall dwell amongst us; we command thee to withdraw thyself from the church and the Massachusetts Bay Colony."

That Anne Hutchinson and members of her flock were massacred in Rhode Island some time after her banishment was taken by her accusers as verification of her offenses against God and the church.

The entire action took place in the attic of a colony general store, furnished with weathered casks, a small wooden chest and a sturdy storage box of weathered wood, draped with burly textiles.

Handsome costuming, effective lighting and a versatile chorus that served up an angry populace, a glad fellowship or a proper hymn as needed added attractive atmospherics to a neatly tailored production, but amplification would have helped a large and responsive audience enjoy the excellent acting even more.