

East

Off-Off Broadway *May 01, 2002*

To Kill A Mockingbird

Reviewed By Lee Collins

The recent presentation of "To Kill a Mockingbird" by fledgling theatre company Nicu's Spoon was nothing short of inspiring. Not because the performances were polished. And not because the production design was flawless. Far from it. And there were technical glitches as well. For most of the first act, the cast had to maneuver around a screen door that refused to stay shut.

Yet there was much to admire in this offering of the Harper Lee classic. Christopher Sergel's 1970 adaptation gracefully translates the source material—not an easy task when comparisons to Horton Foote's Oscar-winning screenplay are inevitable. Co-founder-director Stephanie Barton-Farcas' staging didn't just break the fourth wall; it inventively obliterated it. Actors roamed into the audience, which itself served as the jury in pivotal courtroom scenes. The incidental music by Damon Law was atmospheric without being intrusive. And several of the performances were effective. Ellen Rae Huang was charming as Miss Maudie, and Norm Golden imbued the role of Atticus Finch with a quiet dignity. Omar Reyes as Dill achieved the near impossible: An adult, he managed to portray a youngster without appearing obnoxious or cloying. So why was the production inspiring? Despite its limitations, the company's love of literature and the craft of acting shone. It was obvious that for all involved, this was truly a labor of love. Such purity of purpose is rarely found these days—but it is the essence of good theatre. Expect great things to come from Nicu's Spoon.

"To Kill A Mockingbird"

Presented by Nicu's Spoon, Inc. at ATA-The Sargent Theater, 314 W. 54 St., NYC, April 3-21.