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LEGIT REVIEWS

Ecstasy and the Ice Queen

(Promenade Playhouse; 60 seats; \$20 top)

An Ashley and Paul McQuade presentation of a play in one act written and performed by Justine Moore. Directed by Frederick Johntz. Sets, Johntz; lights, Max Pierson; sound, Moore. Opened May 21, 2005. Reviewed May 29. Runs through July 17. Running time: 1 HOUR, 20 MIN.

By JULIO MARTINEZ

In a perf tour de force, scripter-thesp Justine Moore has mined her youth as the ragingly dysfunctional daughter of hippie parents in 1980s Taos, N.M. Moore uses her impressively malleable voice and body to evoke the experiences and personalities that seared or soothed the psyche of an insecure 16-year-old as she struggled to maintain her will to live. In a series of vignettes, beautifully paced by helmer Frederick Johntz, Moore romps through the evolving mindset of her alter ego, Ice Queen, in the volatile atmosphere of an ethnically and culturally divided community where she is the minority.

Moore plays the tormented teen as she reluctantly befriends perky-to-the-max Crystal, a fellow Anglo hippie child whose always positive attitude transcends the relentless cruelty the girls suffer at the hands of the



Justine Moore mines her youth in the one act single-person "Ecstasy and the Ice Queen."

locals. Crystal squeals with delight when she learns they both have suffered many of the same indignities, including a lifetime of sexual abuse. For Crystal, a never-ending supply of drugs heals all wounds.

Moore flows effortlessly between Ice Queen's constant doom and gloom and Crystal's perpetual sunshine as the girls prepare to take advantage of Crystal's parents' absence to hold an unfettered "rager" to attract all the youth in the town, Anglos and Latinos alike. During the course of the comic but horrifically cathartic party, our protagonist learns just how valuable and necessary it is to have Crystal in her life.

As Moore channels the colorful menagerie of characters that flow in and out of the party, she displays an awe-inspiring ability to immediately capture the personalities and motivations of many diverse folk. This is especially true of two pivotal characters: the aristocratic Latino charmer Alex, whom Ice Queen adores, and the psychopathic Victor, a specter of destruction whom she loathes.

In one of the production's telling highlights, Crystal displays her innate worth as a friend as she coolly thwarts Victor's knife-wielding intentions toward Ice Queen by making him a graphically enticing offer he can't refuse.

During Moore's reminiscence, she often steps forward as a narrator to relate information about the historical background of the Taos "hippie wars" of her youth, as well as facts about teen suicide and drug abuse. Fortunately, these asides are mere accents and do not impinge on the flow of the girls' misadventures.

Moore takes the time to offer a complete rundown of Victor's life beyond the rager, but it would have been interesting to know the future exploits of Crystal and Alex as well, since they were such positive influences to our life-challenged heroine.

Johntz's simple, single-chair set is all that Moore needs to weave her captivating tale. The performance is nicely underscored by Moore's mood-enhancing sound design and the evocative lights of Max Pierson.