

Death, who has decided to spend a vacation in human form—conveniently, as Prince Sirki, a recently deceased guest expected at the villa. Only host Lambert (Richard Lauson) is let in on the secret.

Sirki (Dennis Stevens) is visiting the world of mortals in order to experience love, but his search quickly becomes more focused: He wants to find a woman capable of loving his true self. "Can you imagine how lonely I am?" he asks Lambert. The exotic and provocative prince evokes admiration in the men and desire in the women, particularly in Grazia (Clancy DeCew), a young woman searching for something exciting in her life.

Interestingly enough, the lengthy three-act does not contain a single significant subplot; nearly all the humor surrounding Sirki concerns his unusual situation, which grows somewhat tiresome.

Director Haden Jordan's production would have benefited from cutting some extraneous elements: The 1929 script suffers from repetition—many scenes and monologues are too long—and the cast is unnecessarily large. Of the 13 characters six are virtually superfluous, and four of the five first-time TOTR actors have trouble making anything happen onstage, though they're bound to improve over the course of the run.

After Death sheds a cheesy skull mask for Sirki's period dress, the show looks wonderful—costumes are lush and beautiful, and the '20s set is functional and attractive.

Holiday is often sensuous; a steamy scene between Sirki and Alda (Donna McGuire) was an opening-night audience favorite. Despite the weighty subject matter, humor is generously sprinkled through the production, most courtesy of Baron Cesarea (Michael

PHOTO/MARK THAMAN



THEY WOULD BE FRIENDS Lilianna Calderaro (left) and Katherine Marx star in Theatre Out of a Suitcase's season-opening *A Coupla White Chicks Sitting Around Talking*.

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McLaughlin), an irreverent gent who talks with Sirki of the mysteries of romance. McLaughlin is solid in the role, providing comic relief without losing realism.

As the Duke, Lauson nearly succeeds in holding *Holiday* together with a strong,

believable presence. TOTR first-timer Kevin Bendorf, portraying Grazia's fiancée Corrado, is smooth and competent though sometimes overpowering the other actors with his huge, rich voice.

In the play's key role, Dennis Stevens is charismatic and credible, if not commanding;

his Sirki affects a necessarily mysterious presence. Like most of the characters, the flighty Grazia is not onstage long enough to make much impression, but DeCew handles the part capably.

Death Takes a Holiday runs through May 5 in Paradise.

A Coupla White Chicks Sitting Around Talking is a light, insubstantial comedy that falls short when reaching for more. John Ford Noonan's script ultimately fails the actors in the middle of the second act, running into a dead end that leads to an anticlimactic and improbable conclusion.

But until that point, Theatre Out of a Suitcase's production of *Chicks* is unpretentious, convincing and extremely funny. Humor comes close to redeeming the short two-act; the dia-

logue and situations are often hilarious.

The two-character play's plot is simple: Upper-class New York housewife Maude Mix (Katherine Marx) is startled while dancing in her kitchen one Monday morning by new neighbor Hannah Mae Bindler (Lilianna Calderaro), who admits spying, demands a

cup of coffee and announces herself "intrigued" by Maude.

Despite Maude's declaration that "This is not going to work out; we have no future as neighbors," the two become friends. In the space of a week, they learn about each other and themselves through personality clashes and philandering husbands.

Chicks gets better as it continues—until the final scene and a half, where Noonan obviously lost control of the play's direction.

Maude's and Hannah Mae's contrasting personalities provide the impetus for much of the show's humor. The characterizations are too extreme for the chemistry to be all it could be, though Marx and Calderaro work well enough together.

Director Huriel Nellis sets Calderaro in constant motion, which quickly becomes goofy and slapstick. Though likable and mostly credible, Calderaro has difficulty maintaining a consistent Texas twang while engaged in over-the-top physicality.

As the aloof (for the first act, anyway) Maude, Katherine Marx is terrific, though several mood and attitude swings come abruptly, with little or no warning; Maude's disposition toward Hannah Mae shifts from animosity to congeniality in the space of a couple of lines. It's disconcerting.

Performances and interplay are sure to smooth out over the show's run, and an unusually elaborate and attractive powder-blue kitchen set by Hugh Brashear is an unexpected highlight of what is, overall, an enjoyable production.

Opening Suitcase's eighth season, *Chicks* runs through May 9 in the garden of LaSalle's restaurant.

—MATTHEW BUDMAN

9-19-90

theater review

Love And Death

'Death Takes a Holiday'
Theatre on the Ridge, Paradise

'A Coupla White Chicks Sitting Around Talking'
Theatre Out of a Suitcase, Chico

Billed as a "dramatic fantasy," Theater on the Ridge's latest production, *Death Takes a Holiday*, promises much and delivers most of it. The production is more theatrical than typical Paradise shows but—thankfully—is no more somber, though adding to the local series of recent shows concerning death (*Grandmother Dies*, *No Exit*, *Steambath*, *Endgame*, etc.).

Holiday chronicles a three-day visit to the villa of Duke Lambert by none other than