



## Theater Listings: July 23 - 29, 2014

07.22.14 - 3:37 pm | Robert Avila, reviewer

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**Sweet Maladies Brava Theater Center, 2781 24th St, SF; [www.brava.org](http://www.brava.org). \$15. Thu-Sat, 8pm; Sun, 3pm. Through Aug 3.** Three sisters, former slaves in the household of a petulant mistress, hesitate in the uncertain wake of their formal emancipation in Zakiyyah Alexander's tightly written, potent new drama. Cecile (Britney Frazier) is the haughty rebel to older sister Polly's (Kehinde Koyejo) gentler, more cautious nature, while youngest sister Mary (Stefanée Martin) is the seeming innocent who has nevertheless absorbed the full range of slavery's debased operations — a fact made clear by Mary vis-à-vis her ragdoll in a startlingly well done soliloquy. As witty as it is ferocious, the play — rewardingly inspired by Jean Genet's *The Maids* — is at one level all about role-playing. Even as the sisters appropriate and swap roles with each other and their cruel yet needy and equally unmoored mistress (Lisa Ann Porter), a small minstrel stage serves the action as a point of surreal underscoring, adding another layer to the cultural morass in which they struggle for definition and agency. Furtive in its unfolding, the play nevertheless plunges with productive candor into the convoluted violence of American society and culture, its compact yet subtle excavation well served by this intimate production in Brava's upstairs studio theater, where Edris Cooper-Anifowoshe directs a uniformly strong cast in sharp and lucid performances. (Avila)