

# "Suddenly Last Summer"

Profile Theatre Project almost decided to close for the year when it lost its theater space in the Portland Art Museum last summer. This "Suddenly Last Summer," which plays with another Williams one-act, "Something Unspoken," both directed by Jane Unger, shows why theater fans rejoiced when the company found a new home.

It's not Williams' best work, but it does offer another chance to see one of Profile's most valuable assets, Gaynor Sterchi, playing two of Williams' quintessential older Southern women. Sterchi possesses the gravity, dignity and craftiness to make them startling, even terrifying, despite our familiarity with them in Williams' work.

"Something Unspoken" is the more finely drawn of the two plays, if less well known. Williams tells a little story about Cornelia, a grand Southern matriarch, at a moment of humiliation. Cornelia (Sterchi) is in the process of losing an election at one of her clubs, an unaccustomed defeat, and at the same time she attempts to reach out, however clumsily and imperiously, to her secretary (Jean Miller) to affirm their emotional connection.

In "Suddenly Last Summer" Cornelia's pathos takes a darker turn into the madness of Mrs. Venable, a grand dame willing to lobotomize her niece Catherine in order to protect the reputation of her son. Jami Chatalas as the niece with a secret threatens to lurch into camp with her performance, but



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Gaynor Sterchi and Leif Norby star in Profile Theatre Project's "Suddenly Last Summer," which runs through Sunday.

## Inside

### ■ THIRD REVIEW:

Barry Johnson reviews "The Further Adventures of Anse and Bhule in Norman's Land"/E3

somehow it works, playing off the grimness of Sterchi and Williams' melodramatic script. With its suggested gay theme, dangerous territory in 1958, and its cannibalistic conclusion, "Suddenly Last Summer" can get a bit torrid, but that's part of the fun at this point. The Profile version is

clean and clearly acted throughout.

*Profile Theatre Project. Continues 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays, 3 p.m. Sunday, through Jan. 23, Firehouse Theatre, 1436 S.W. Montgomery St.; \$10-\$16; 242-0080.*