

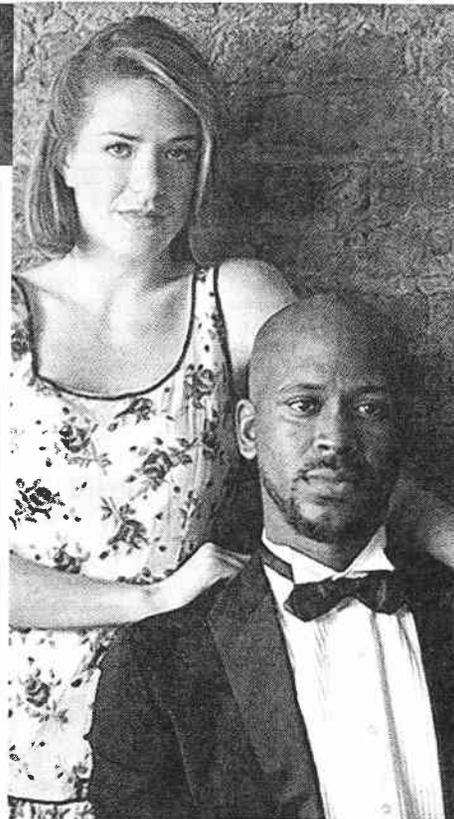
# A 'Wild Party' in Brooklyn

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**The Gallery Players offers up a jazzy night of theater**

**BY MICHAEL GILTZ**

**A**ndrew Lipka's Off-Broadway musical "The Wild Party" has deserved to be revived in New York since it squared off in 2000 with a competing musical based on the same story. Actress Nicole Sterling was going to Broadway in Stephen Sondheim's "Bounce" when *that* show closed out of town. Now both have found a home Off-Off-Broadway at the Gallery Players, a Brooklyn institution for more than 40 years.



Members of The Gallery Players (l.-r.) Allie Schulz, Michael Jones, Jonathan Hack and Nicole Sterling, in character for "The Wild Party." Photo by Neal J. Freeman

A tiny but thriving space in Park Slope, Brooklyn, the Gallery Players has shown a knack for clever revivals of Broadway shows that pack in audiences for the brief, 16-performance run allowed by its Showcase agreement with Actors Equity (an agreement that also specifies an \$18 ticket price for the 99-seat space).

The Gallery Players doesn't just draw in new audiences; it also appeals to working actors who see the short runs and high-quality material as the perfect opportunity to do what they love and maybe get spotted by directors, producers and casting agents in the audience.

Sterling was already a fan of Lipka's "The Wild Party" — a musical about doomed Jazz Age lovers inspired by a then-scandalous 1928 poem by writer Joseph Moncure March, which was reissued in 1994 with vibrant black-and-white illustrations by Art Spiegelman — when she heard Gallery Players would be mounting it Feb. 2-24.

"I used some of the music for auditions in the past and it serves me really well," says Sterling, who missed the show during its Off-Broadway run but loved the cast album. She was also familiar with the Gallery, having seen a friend perform there a few years ago.

"It's wonderful to go to a rehearsal and be with people who are all on the same page," says Sterling, who plays Queenie, the hard-drinking center of the show. "The whole point of a showcase is to show New York some of



**Artwork for Off-Broadway musical "The Wild Party" at Gallery Players. Illustration by Mike Malbrough**

the talent they might not otherwise see because we're out of the way. There's tons of talent that goes unnoticed."

For Matt Schicker, Gallery Players executive director and president, that's the focus of the company he has volunteered at for more than five years. (Literally everyone involved works for free, with the actors receiving only the most basic expenses, like travel money.)

"There are a million performers in New York and only so many jobs," says Schicker, who lives two blocks from the Gallery Players space in Park Slope and also works

at the National Alliance for Musical Theater. "It's very attractive for them to have the opportunity to work on a show like 'The Wild Party,' which has great featured roles. And directors, producers and casting people are here, so there's a better chance they'll see your work."

Formed in 1967 (a teenage Harvey Fierstein was one of the founders), the Gallery Players has been a showcase for Fierstein and others, including director John Rando (a Tony Award winner for "Urinetown") and actress Deidre Goodwin (part of the current Broadway revival of "A Chorus Line"). It also nurtures talent with a new playwright festival; mounting a recent, critically acclaimed production of the appealing new musical "Yank!" (by David and Joseph Zelnik), which is sure to have a future life

Off-Broadway; and programs for kids and teenagers.

Most of all, it's a place for a talent like Sterling to remember why she does theater in the first place.

"I got that dose of reality right off the bat," Sterling says with a laugh about her time in Sondheim's "Bounce," a great opportunity even if it didn't have the long life one would expect for a new musical from a theatrical giant.

"Doing the Gallery Players, it's just about we're here because we want to be here and we want to do a show that we all care about and do the best job we can. We don't have to think about, 'Does this sell? Are people going to like this?' We just do it." ♦

*("The Wild Party," Feb 2 - 24; 199 14th St., between Fourth and Fifth Avenues, Park Slope; 718-595-0547.)*