

JUN 14 1975

At the Julian**'A Gentle Person':  
Subject's the Thing**

By Bernard Weiner

"A Very Gentle Person," the play about the assassination and conviction of Sirhan Sirhan that had its premiere last night at the Julian Theater, is not well-written, is beset by acting and production problems, but still manages to maintain our interest.

But for that we can thank the awesome meaning of the slaying, which provides a built-in theatrical magnetism. The script, by East Bay assassination buff Hans Steinkellner, is plodding, repetitive, overlong, hokey and dependent upon a lot of conjecture that doesn't really hold up.

Act I, most of which could be eliminated, involves the police interrogation of Sirhan immediately after the slaying. Act II takes place in the holding cell as Sirhan describes to his attorney what he can recall of the killing, which is virtually nothing.

Act III, which is the worst written and yet the most fascinating, has Sirhan being hypnotized in an effort to get him to relive the details of the awful event.

In essence, Steinkellner's play attempts to establish that a "fix" was on and that Sirhan was an easily manipulated patsy. Even in the final scenes, when a gunshot accident could explain the death of Kennedy just as well as a conspiracy theory, Steinkellner can think only of "fix."

It seems clear from the evidence that Steinkellner assembled from the official record that Sirhan was in a disassociated state during the slaying—either from a self-induced trance or as a result of being hypnotized by someone else—but his defense team was never able to prove this to the jury and, after seeing Steinkellner's play, it's easy to understand why.

About all one can say of the play is that it raises some serious questions about the case—especially about the possibility of a woman companion at the slaying, and the behavior of the cops in getting testimony changed—but not in a theatrically satisfying way.

Paul Willis shines as Sirhan, a thoroughly con-



PAUL WILLIS  
As Sirhan

fused and flaky young man. Jack Weir adds a well-handled portrait of a key witness.

Ed Weingold and Richard Reineccius codirected, adding some dramatic touches to Steinkellner's wordy script. It plays at 8:30 tonight and again at 8:30 next Friday and Saturday nights at the Julian, 953 De Haro street.