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THEATRE

Waiting for Godot

Review by Deborah McGee

Waiting For Godot is the finest University Theatre production I've seen in Robinson Theatre. Even if you've experienced the play before, you'll want to catch director Peter Davis's fresh and capable approach to Samuel Beckett's superb script.

Davis decries the "boring" label often applied to *Waiting For Godot*, and says the play "is mainly misunderstood—even by directors." He brings Beckett's 1952 play alive, emphasizing the comedy inherent in it less than the heavy symbolism too many people associate with it. With his approach, many things in the play finally make sense: the business with the carrots, turnips and radishes; the hat-trading scene; and the scene in Act II when the four principal characters are squirming on the floor in one eight-legged heap. What draws us to the "theater of the absurd" may not be the ponderous stuff literary critics ramble on about, but because modern life is absurdly funny.

The characters appear in white face and deliver their lines fairly rapidly, with plenty of time left for non-verbal play. It works well here. Their patter is in the style of vaudeville performers, with its cross talk and physicality. Much of the play's humor comes from its connections to other early comedians of our culture. Joseph Acosta as Vladimir and Brad Mead as Estragon parry words back and

forth in a way which echoes Laurel and Hardy routines. The bowler trading sequence is straight out of the Marx Brothers' *Duck Soup*. In costumes of mismatched black and white plaid by Nancy Julian, Didi and Gogo, as the duo call each other, also resemble slightly more dapper versions of Charles Chaplin's beloved Tramp.

Jerry Williams again shows what a pro he is at creating awesome sets. The obligatory tree stage-center is upon a silver-grey road, painted in grid lines on the stage, and running up a backdrop at stage rear. Its design gives a lovely depth to the set. Framing the stage are what look like broken chunks of mortar, reminiscent of ruins of former civilizations. They effectively add a timeless quality to the questions of existence raised in the play.

Enrique Arias pulls off a masterful Lucky. With his long, light-grey hair and exaggerated eyebrows, he looks like a stock Japanese theater character. When urged with "Think, Pig" by his overweening master, Pozzo, he gives his long and only speech with split-second rapidity and perfect rhythm, punctuated by whoops, rubber-man gestures and faces. It was the stroke of genius to have the nonsensical speech, a veritable word-collage, delivered thus; it usually tempts the audience into too much analysis. Its psychobabbling, gibberish quality

here is daring—and brilliant.

The greatest comedy has seriousness at heart. After all the clever repartee, the jokes about doing away with themselves, the pratfalls, the stinky shoes and the twirled-then-stroked bowlers, suddenly Joe Acosta steps to the front of the stage. He delivers a soliloquy with a style so moving that all of Robinson Theater hushed, intensely listening. Davis has discovered the very apex of the play, and Acosta paces it just right. Divinely poignant. A great theater moment, and more than anything the reason for the production's artistic success.

Mead is good as Estragon, funny to begin with, with his red bush of hair and red-rimmed eyes, and consistent in his sad-face demeanor. Stan Freitag comes across well as the arrogant, obtuse Pozzo. His bald pate, however, did appear a bit too false and fragile. Judi Wetzell looks like Jackie Coogan as The Boy, and does it as well as anyone could. As the Card Girl, Carole Oberholtzer is a delightfully dizzy persona, extending the vaudeville flavor nicely—the hole in her black stocking is a great touch.

Saturday night, silence followed the play's end instead of a curtain call. It was wonderful just to sit there immersed in the power of the play, still feeling the reverberations of Acosta's speech. The characters just say, "Shall we go?" and that's it. It was nice not having the obligatory bowing and smiling, for they had given us their all. University Theatre's production is bold and brilliant from beginning to end.

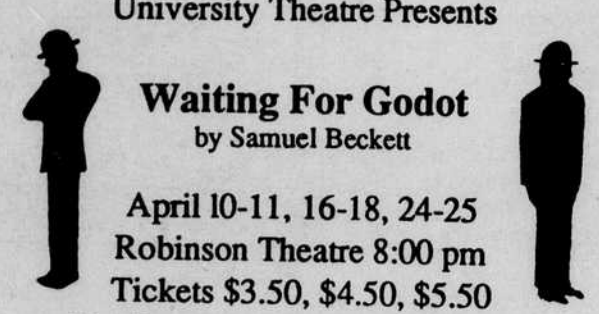
See *What's Happening's* calendar for earthy details.

University Theatre Presents

Waiting For Godot

by Samuel Beckett

April 10-11, 16-18, 24-25
Robinson Theatre 8:00 pm
Tickets \$3.50, \$4.50, \$5.50
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