

'Investigation' Unfolds as Requiem Mass

University Theatre staged a requiem mass for six million victims of Nazi concentration camps Friday night with its presentation of Peter Weiss' "The Investigation."

And the drama which unfolded on the UT stage had the general tone of a eulogy—simple, somber, and straightforward.

Still, one can carry this funeral analogy only so far without contradicting oneself—the implication here is that Weiss has attempted to bury a corpse.

On the contrary, he has unearthed one—a very ripe one—in creating a documentary drama which details the administrative measures taken by Nazi Germany in the management of Auschwitz, a detention-extermination center in which many of the measures of the greatest bloodbath in history were implemented.

No Applause

What results is a disturbing, possibly a devastating, reminder which kept Friday's audience uncomfortable throughout its three-hours-plus run, caused a considerable number to leave during intermission, and (quite appropriately) elicited no applause at the final curtain.

The factor chiefly responsible for the play's impact is its basis in fact—playwright Weiss has gleaned all dialogue from court records of testimony given at the Frankfurt war trials of 1964-65.

This testimony, which led to the conviction of 21 of the camp's officers, coldly reconstructs conditions of unbelievable brutality which are repug-

nant even to those persons not affected by World War II.

Weiss utilizes this carefully edited material in re-creating the atmosphere of the trial. His play is merely a framework for a factual courtroom drama in which numerous witnesses are called to testify against the camp officers; by exposing the audience to the evidence presented, Weiss ostensibly calls upon them to serve as jurors. Beyond this, there is no semblance of plot.

The production which unfolded Friday night was of generally commendable quality, demonstrating once again director Jean Cutler's ability to adapt unconventional drama to the UT stage.

Action in Audience

Cutler has encouraged the development of individual characterizations in assigning the roles of witnesses and accused, and he uses every available amount of space in sustaining the action of the play—an important factor in the presentation of a vehicle whose format remains relatively unchanged.

Cutler's most significant idea in this respect was to have wit-

nesses and accused move into the audience following intermission. This inventive piece of direction made the drama more personal and, needless to say, twice as effective.

There were a number of standout performances among members of the large cast, with David Grieve and Mark Malinauskas taking top honors in their roles as witnesses. J. David Baldrige tended to rush his lines in his role as the judge, but the formidable question-and-answer aspect of his part makes this excusable.

Charles Blankenship and Benjamin Masters, as the prosecuting attorney and counsel for defense, were also excellent. Gordon Scott, T. Blake Conley, and Robert Emmons were effective as three of the accused.

Cinematographics

All this aside, I could argue the use of two devices employed in the production. The first involves projection of cinematographics as a kind of graphic blandishment for many of the play's sequences—unquestionably well-done, these films occasionally created effective contrasts to the action transpiring

on stage, but eventually served little purpose save to provide minor distraction.

Secondly, the use of Black actors in the roles of witnesses and accused seems to be carrying civil rights to a ridiculous extreme. It might be argued that this tokenism was intended to point out the significance of race as an integral part of Nazi policy, but, this being common knowledge, one is all the more aware of the impossibility of the presence of a Negro Nazi officer represents. The departure from observed fact in this connection is in uncomfortable contrast to

the stark realism of the play as a whole.

"Pot Shot"

I might permit myself one pot-shot in questioning the relevance of the play itself. Those affected by Nazi policy during the war need hardly be reminded of it, and current parallels to Nazism in world conflict provide a more educational example than the play itself.

"The Investigation" points out nothing that cannot be seen in news coverage of the Vietnam war—and it emerges as a play which is nauseating rather than cathartic.

It plays again May 22-25, and tickets may be purchased at the UT box office from noon to 5 p.m. daily.

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- 1:30—Legendary Pianists
- 2:00—Out of Sight with Sound: Mary Newman is your hostess. At 3, Jon Wu
- 5:00—News
- 5:30—Bill Hagerman Commentary
- 5:45—Rod and Charles Show: "The Story of a Tail"
- 6:00-9:00—Chamber Music, with hostess Claire Quebedeau
- 9:00—KWAV Controversy with Robert Packwood
- 10:00—News
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