

# Production of Ibsen's 'Ghosts' focuses on poignancy of play

By Nicole Krueger  
Managing Editor

Henrik Ibsen's "ghosts" aren't terribly controversial today, in an age when children learn about syphilis in junior high school, when pre-teens read about incest in V.C. Andrews novels and when feminism is yesteryear's catch phrase. In fact, these worn-out issues have long since given way to new issues, such as AIDS and assisted suicide.

So it is hard for us to imagine the uproar "Ghosts" ignited when it hit the stage in Norway in 1881.

"Ghosts" is the story of a rich Norwegian widow, Mrs. Alving, who, just as she is about to erect a monument to her late husband, learns that her beloved son, a painter living in Paris, is afflicted with syphilis. Bombarded with hypocritical advice from her old friend Pastor Manders, she is forced to confront the chains of duty that have bound her all her life as she tries

to exorcise the ghosts left behind by her dead husband.

In its time, "Ghosts" confronted issues no one wanted to talk about or see reflected back at them on the stage. It accused upper-class people of being unable to think for themselves. It accused the clergy of corruption. And it hung the upper class' dirty laundry out for the world to see by exploring the issues of infidelity, illegitimate children and sexually transmitted diseases.

Today, in an age when we are continually forced to wear our dirty laundry in the public eye, when society's problems are held up before our eyes as a part of everyday life and when theater almost always explores one issue or another, it takes a lot less courage to produce "Ghosts" than it did in Norway

in 1881.

But it does take courage to take on this play with the sincerity and depth of emotion that the University Theatre did.

It would have been easy to succumb to the play's countless humorous barbs and witticisms, making the truths it presents — no less poignant for their outdateness — easier to swallow with the proverbial

spoonful of sugar. But the cast of "Ghosts," directed by Neil Vanderpool, didn't take the easy way out. Instead, they dismissed the play's humor as secondary, eliciting a few laughs but striving for a higher goal: to express the poignancy of the play and to make it mean something to University students today.

Ryan Moulder's tired, dis-

eased and agonized Oswald was captivating — his performance during the last act was emotionally believable and reached beyond the imaginary "fourth wall" of theater to leave a lasting impression and to tell the audience what this play is really about.

Rebecca Foster was equally believable as Mrs. Alving, a proper yet hardened 19th century woman whose love for her son forces her to make agonizing decisions until the end, when she must make the most agonizing decision of all. And Mark Zolun's Pastor Manders was both delightfully naive and infuriatingly self-righteous.

Through their sincere and emotional performances, the cast members of "Ghosts" brought the 117-year-old play into the present, reminding us of the issues we face today, such as AIDS and assisted suicide, and reminding us that the ghosts of our actions today will haunt our children in ways we cannot begin to imagine.

## Second Season Theatre Production

See Henrik Ibsen's "Ghosts" in one of its last two performances

■ **WHAT:** The University Theatre's production of Henrik Ibsen's "Ghosts," a play about a widow who must come to terms with the dark secrets of her past when her son develops a debilitating disease.

■ **WHEN:** March 13 and 14 at 8 p.m.

■ **WHERE:** Arena Theatre

■ **TICKETS:** \$3 for University students, \$5 for senior citizens and University faculty and staff and \$5 for the general public. For more information, call the University Theatre Box Office at 346-4191

### THEATRE REVIEW

#### Ghosts

Written by Henrik Ibsen

Directed by Neil Vanderpool

■ **TYPE:** Commentary

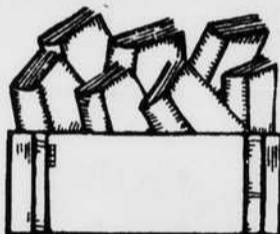
■ **WHERE:** Arena Theatre

■ **RATING:** ★★★★★

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