

British invasion sweeps Pocket Playhouse

■ 'Dogs Barking' tackles British accents and tough themes, including the end of a relationship



THEATER

Pocket Playhouse, 'Dogs Barking'

★★★★☆

By Mason West
Oregon Daily Emerald

The British accents are coming!
The British accents are coming!

"Dogs Barking" is the first Pocket Playhouse production this year to tread the shaky ground of accented dialogue. Director Greg Thorson committed himself to accents when he selected the play by British playwright Richard Zajdlic. When done poorly, accents usually weigh plays down; fortunately, these actors pull them off quite nicely. The problem is that the theater creates so much echo that the stylized dialogue becomes incomprehensibly muffled at times.

Usually the set in the Pocket Playhouse helps to cancel out the bouncing sound, but Thorson has chosen to use almost no set for his interpretation of the play. The script calls for a very real and physical London flat. Thorson has provided three blocks symbolizing a couch and a number of suspended "doorways" made from PVC piping. The result is visually interesting but creates demands on the viewer's imagination to justify the setting.

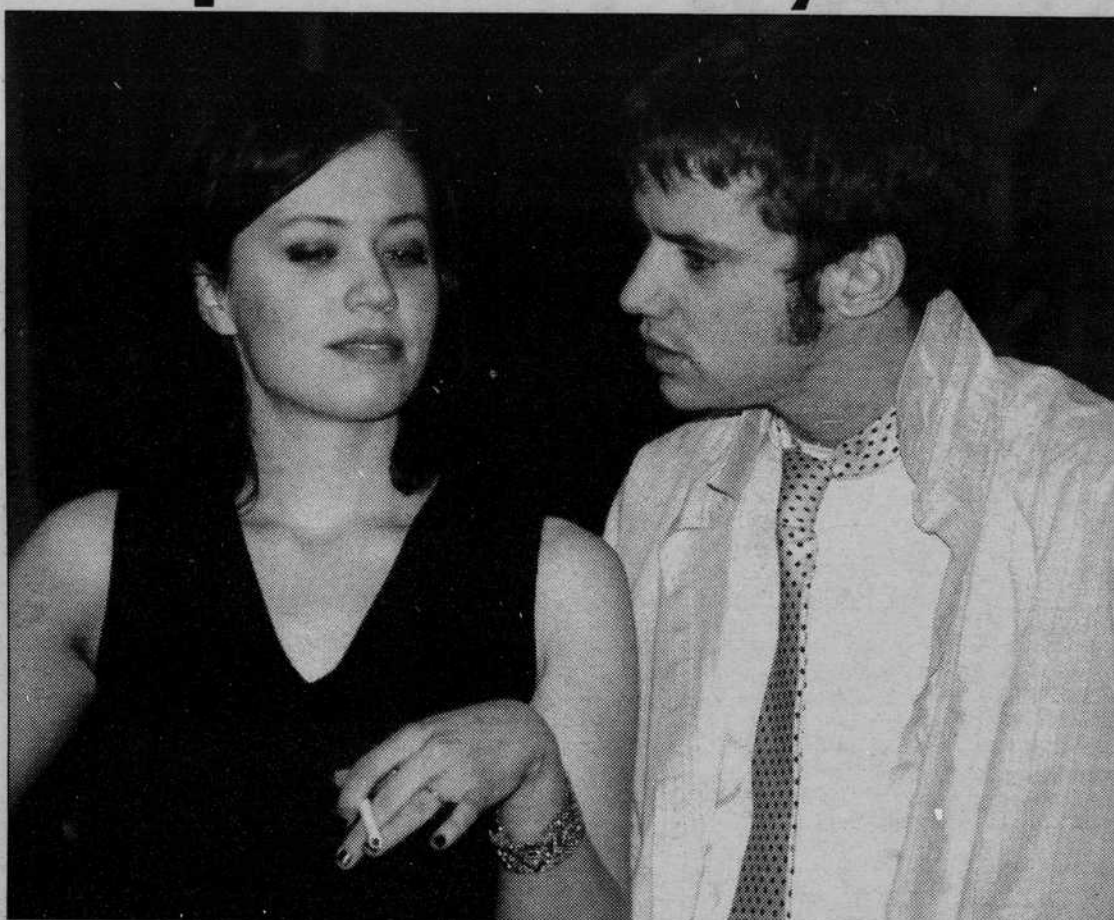
Thorson was hesitant to commit

to an explanation, but he suggested the doorways connect the characters with aspects of their pasts that they deal with during the show. The play has only four characters, all of whom are struggling with various difficulties. The central action revolves around Neil and his ex-girlfriend Alex. There is still some connection between them, but neither of them knows what to do about it.

Instead of actually talking about their problems, they fight over possession of the flat. Neil involves his friend Ray in the dispute, and Alex's sister jumps in as well. These two characters seem auxiliary to the direction of the play, but they serve to maintain the audience's sanity, which would otherwise be lost in the bickering between Neil and Alex.

The tension is not in any way the fault of the actors, just the nature of the characters' relationship. Actors Joe Von Appen, Elizabeth Flesh, Jackie Jacobus and Alexander Pawlowski all do an excellent job with their roles, but the men in particular succeed in making great characters. Von Appen and Pawlowski create most of the sparse comedic action in the play as well as taking us to some of the darker places found in theater.

To protect against some of the tougher themes in the play, Thorson chose to use a number of alienation devices for this show. An alienation device is anything that serves to remind the audience members that they are watching a play. The cast can be seen talking out of character offstage where no effort has been made to hide the rigging and tools that line the Pocket walls. Thorson leaves the



Adam Amato Emerald

Vickie (Elizabeth Flesh) tries unsuccessfully to seduce her sister's ex-boyfriend, Neil (Joe Von Appen), in the play "Dogs Barking."

house lights on during the performance except for certain dramatic moments to give the audience firmer ground than sitting in darkness. He even goes so far as to flash the lights on and off at unspecified times in the show, creating the feeling of a skipping CD. Without any real purpose the light flashes are annoying, but they cer-

tainly catch the audience off-guard.

Thorson hopes that these devices will make the audience members experience the show on a more intellectual level, which could happen if they are willing to put out the effort. There is a lot to think about in this show, but theater's traditional role is as enter-

tainment. The success of taking the play from escape to analysis only works if the people who come to see it are prepared to think.

"Dogs Barking" runs Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 5 p.m. in the Pocket Playhouse in Villard Hall. There is a \$1 suggested donation for entry.

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