

Arts

waiting for ms. godot

by Jeannine Amber

"I'm not trying to make a feminist statement," says Professor Ron Singer in response to questions about the production of *Waiting for Godot* currently staged by York's fourth year theatre class.

In order to attain permission to produce *Waiting for Godot*, perhaps the most famous play by recently deceased Irish born playwright Samuel Beckett, Singer was required to sign an agreement stating that he would follow the playwrights' instructions, to the letter, in matters of stage direction and casting. According to Singer, Beckett is one of the only playwrights who demands that theatre companies adhere so strictly to his scripts. In the past, it was not beyond Beckett to close down productions of his plays if they did not meet with his approval.

In this production, usually performed by an all male cast, Singer has cast the play exclusively with women. This move directly contradicts Beckett's stipulations and is in disagreement with the contract signed by Singer.

But, Singer wishes to point out that "other than the fact that there are five women in this production, we have pretty well stuck to every single thing that [Beckett] has asked for." Singer feels confident there will be no serious repercussions of his action. "York University [is not] serious theatrical territory so the likelihood of the people who rent out the royalties coming up and saying 'you shouldn't do it' is pretty slim."

If making a feminist statement is not Singer's intention, why then has he chosen to put on a play written for male characters and cast women in all the roles? Particularly given that this is the precise action which, in the past, brought Beckett to sue the producers, directors and all the cast of productions of *Waiting for Godot*. According to Singer, his decision was pragmatic rather than philosophical. "There were four women in the fourth year class who needed a script. I felt that *Godot* would suit the needs perfectly of these women."

Denial of feminist motives aside, Singer comments that he has discovered, in *Waiting for Godot*, themes of particular relevance to women.

"The theme, in my opinion, is waiting . . . and I think that waiting, while universal, applies in some ways more to women than to men. The concept of waiting is something that is very familiar to women. Waiting for their men to return from war, waiting for the men to come home from work. Men were the doers and women, particularly in the past, but even to this day, were the waiters. They waited."

Whether or not one agrees with the idea of women as more attune to the concept of waiting, Singer maintains that, as a universal theme, it is applicable to everybody and can be expressed by women as well as by men.

Waiting for Godot, which undoubtedly deals with the theme of waiting in a very concrete way, can also be understood as an absurdist play dealing with the abstract themes of futility and hope. As such, it can be a difficult, and demanding play for actors.

For the women in York's theatre programmes' graduating year, the play offers a unique opportunity. "We've never done this kind of high-paced comedy, vaudeville, mystery, extreme surreal," the cast explained. "(It's a) stretch in a way that we don't get the opportunity to be stretched in," commented Karen Svendsen who plays Didi.

In addition, *Godot* allows the women the opportunity to play roles that they will doubtfully have the opportunity to play after graduation. It also allows them a chance to play some of the 'great male roles,' as they had done in last semesters' production of *Hamlet*, but with the chance to play them as women. "There was never any question of (these characters) being anything but women," explained Svendsen. "Almost everybody wears skirts."

Svendsen notes that, as a woman, she may have certain advantages over males in dealing with the role. She notes that opposed to a linear way of thinking "women are able to

entertain more possibilities, and that's what you have to do with this play."

The play, beginning January 29, is already sold out for several performances. Singer attributes this to the recent death of Beckett and the increased press he, and his plays, have been receiving as a result.

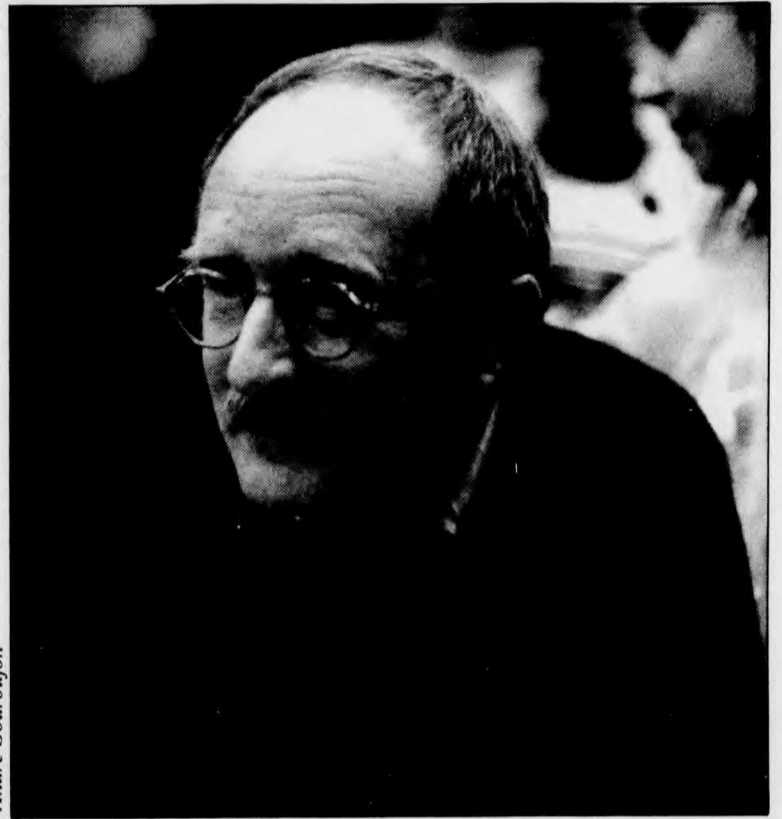
The cast wishes to point out this is not a brooding, intellectual play. "It's not the play you read in high school," they chorus. "It's an exciting, alive piece of theatre," says Rachel Derry who plays Lucky.

On a final note, the cast and interviewer exchanged notions of Beckett's plays as those which allude comprehension. I asked the cast if they now understood the play, being so closely involved in its production.

Svendsen claimed to have "an understanding of it but it's a very personal understanding" while Derry admitted she has "an understanding of moments of it."

Gina Brunton, who plays Gogo, said, "That's my nightmare come true, you guys both understand it and I don't." A lot of nervous laughter over that one.

Waiting For Godot previews



André Souroujon

Director Ron Singer guides an all female cast in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

January 29 and runs from January 30 to February 3 at Atkinson Theatre. Phone 736-5157 for ticket info.

"not the play you read in highschool"



Singer with his cast and crew 'wait' for opening night.

André Souroujon

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