

## Arts cont'd

# godot, an absurd success

by Ira Nayman

ESTRAGON: What is it?  
VLADIMIR: I don't know. A willow.  
ESTRAGON: Where are the leaves?  
VLADIMIR: It must be dead.  
ESTRAGON: No more weeping.  
*Waiting for Godot*  
Samuel Beckett

Theatre of the Absurd is extremely difficult to present well. It requires the performance of both comedy and tragedy, constantly and often at the same time. Philosophically depressing double *entredes*, like the one above are a challenge to actors.

Happily, the Theatre at York's presentation of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is, for the most part, successful.

Gina Brunton and Karen Svendson, as Beckett's tramps Didi and Gogo, are wonderful. Brunton (Gogo) is hilarious, performing the broadest slapstick with great abandon. Svendson (the brooding Didi) is a bit overmatched (alas, the play is written that way), but also has her moments.

Despite the publicity that states the use of humour in this production is "novel," it is integral to the play, and director Ron Singer did well to play it up. Thematically, the comedy is as much a part of the life Beckett is trying to portray as the despair.

Practically, *Waiting for Godot* would be incredibly tedious for an audience to sit through without it.

He has also chosen to leave in the silences, some as long as 10 or 15 seconds. While some members of the audience had difficulty dealing with the long pauses (occasioning the obligatory nervous laughter), they are very important to the play. If



Gina Brunton and Karen Svendson in *Waiting for Godot*.

Beckett's writing is about "the inability to speak, the inability to be silent and solitude," the silence must be given its due. And, it is.

The solitude is also a tangible aspect of this production. The director has given the actors a long stage (20 or 30 feet) in which to perform. Although they sometimes have to run long distances, which makes *Godot* look more like gymnastics than theatre, most often the spaces that occur between characters emphasize their isolation.

I question Singer's decision to use five female actors, especially in light of the fact that Beckett was vehemently opposed to such casting when he was alive. Given the disproportionate number of female actors from which Singer had to choose, a mixed cast play may have been wiser.

Still, aside from a couple of references whose meaning was lost in the transition, the use of an all-female cast didn't make much difference. Despite what Singer may believe about women and waiting (waiting, after all, is only a very small part of *Waiting for Godot*), the casting does not add anything to the play.

On the other hand, despite Beckett's fears, it didn't really detract from it, either.

Beckett is not to everybody's taste. *Waiting for Godot* is not for people looking for a light evening's entertainment. But, for those interested in something weighty or substantial, this is a very worthwhile production.

*The performance continues until Saturday at the Atkinson Theatre. For ticket information, call 736-5157.*



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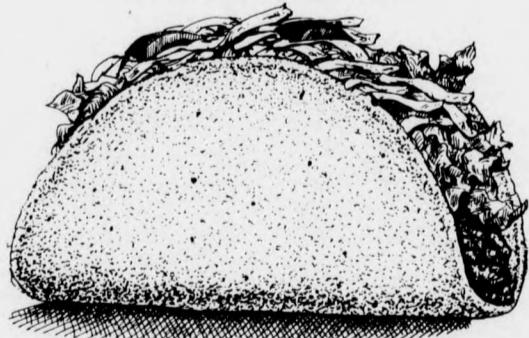
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