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**Menagerie company in Pinter's masterpiece**

**Superb performances strike Home**

By BOB McBRYDE

Pinter plays are haunting, peculiarly poetic, grotesquely, even tragically humorous. Ambiguity, mystification, the impossibility of verification — these are the tools which the playwright skilfully manipulates. Through a delicate balance sustained between comedy and suspense, laughter and dread, he conveys a vision that is deadly serious.

The Homecoming, produced by the Menagerie Theatre Company until December 21 at the Central Library Theatre, is perhaps Pinter's masterpiece. His dialogue contains meanings that transcend those of the words, as verbal confrontations become battles in which the character's diction is his or her primary weapon. A situation is invested with both naturalistic

significance and those universal implications which arise from a depiction of an archetypal situation.

The play takes place in the living room of a strangely diverse English family. Skeletons in the family closet are implied in wandering, yet meaningful discussions between the father Max, and his sons Lenny (a pimp), and Joey (a boxer) as well as with his brother Sam, a chauffeur. Incredible tensions exist between all concerned as implicit in every speech lies the thrust of a symbolic dagger.

**UNACCEPTED STATUS**

Teddy, the prodigal son, arrives home, after a six year absence, with his distracted wife Ruth. Although Teddy's success as an American professor has given him near mythical status in the household pantheon, he cannot assume a place

within the family circle. It is Ruth who gains acceptance in their world of mutedly perverse sexuality.

Like a conqueror goddess she defeats every family member, even the sinewy Lenny whose home is the world of sexual procurement. Eventually she stays with them, assuming the role of mother and lover, in order to replace their dead matriarch — while Teddy returns home to America.

The Homecoming is a work which makes strenuous demands upon any production. Gratuitous violence suddenly emerges from seemingly innocent situations. Grave events are infused with aspects of farce. The Menagerie players, apart from a few difficulties, master the nuances of the script and give quite a credible performance.

Their major difficulty lies in those scenes in which verbal rapaciousness is transformed into physical brutality. Such movements are marred in this production by the actors' problem in conveying the violence of the blows. These incidents become merely humorous rather than hysterically terrifying.

**FIRST RATE**

Sustaining the rhythm of Pinter's dialogue, the production is first rate. With expert casting, and under the controlled direction of David Beard, the play comes alive with those hidden possibilities so vital to its success.

All performances are superb. Tony Miller as Max. Harold Burke as Sam,

and Rick Howes as Joey physically and vocally create believable characters. Peter Stead is marvellously leering in his depiction of the cockney pimp Lenny whose character, containing a multitude of contradictions must be synthesized by a powerful performer.

**VITAL ROLE**

Barry O'Connor is a perfect Teddy, cool yet confused, and with a personality whose residual mystery is superseded only by that of his wife Ruth (Mary Harrison) who conquers the family by look and gesture as well as by a few carefully chosen words. Ms. Harrison is able to create that presence which believably draws the others to her bosom. Her role in the play is vital and she succeeds admirably.

A taste for the work of Pinter is one which is acquired only through exposure to such excellent productions. The work of the Menagerie company in this play is worthy of recognition.

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