

Pinter looks back

Uneasy memories

Old Times
Studio Theatre

review by David Orrell

Harold Pinter has always been an entertaining playwright. In his plays the conversations on stage almost satirize the conversations of real life; familiar chords are constantly struck as the characters settle into attitudes and modes of expression, but the attitudes shift and change, punctuated by moments of uncertainty. At times, the talk has a sense of restlessness without direction; at others of direction without purpose, and there is always indefiniteness and unease.

Pinter has recognized conversation for what it is, a lot of isolated people casting around in a sea of ambiguous words and manners under the impression that they must relate. The irony is that they don't relate; the only real feeling emerges in inarticulate screams; language, at least the language of conversation, being incapable of containing it.

"Old Times", as the title suggests, deals with the remembering of past events. The scenario consists of a married couple, Kate and Deeley, who are visited by Kate's old friend Anna. They each have stories to tell of their lives in London twenty years ago, and their stories overlap in strange and indefinite ways.

As a dramatic structure, "Old Times" is rich and complex; the way each person perceives and presents the past, defining that person and his or her relationship with the others. As a piece of writing, it is one of Pinter's best, with insistent play on the language, probing speech, and at all times, the sense of strong undercurrents of feeling, perhaps guilt, perhaps sexual jealousy, running through the dialogue.

One couldn't hope to see the play more carefully done than in the current production directed by Henry Woolf at Studio Theatre. The cast has clearly thrown itself to the Woolf in an effort to get it right, and the result is a remarkably accurate and deliberate rendition. The rhythm of the language is precise but unforced, and, if the words are ambiguous, they are spoken clear as crystal.

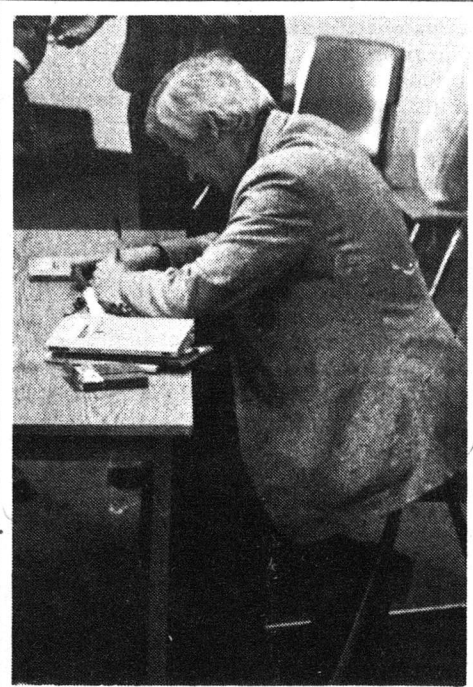
The acting is of a high standard, the best coming from Deborah Kipp who looks and plays a treat as the dreamy Kate; her vacant gaze makes the furniture look alert. Roger Kemp as Deeley and Linda Clark as Anna also have their respective moments, rotating sitting positions on a set, designed by Brian

Currah, that is odd and disturbing: It appears comfortable, with lots of beds and cushions, but it's actual structure looks like the latest creation of the Gumbly School of Architecture.

If you don't know the Gumbly School of Architecture, they are the people who built the Biological Sciences Building. While, however, one can only hope that Biological Sciences will fall down, this looks as if it actually should, and the result is an aesthetic tension that suits the play very well.

If I have any criticism of the evening's delights, it is that the production is almost too careful and deliberate; there is a sort of staid reverence for the script, or even a lack of subtlety, that diminishes the liveliness of the play.

But if you haven't already seen "Old Times", do go, although you will have to hurry because it ends April 5th. Showtime is 8:00 p.m.



A poetry reading

John Newlove comes to campus trailing clouds of mimeographed glory
"tough realistic vision
linguistic and rhythmic grace
brilliant irony;
Admission is free
all are welcome
bring your sandwiches"

Newlove nervously chain smoking
twitching at nothing visible
laughing
(sensitivity isn't the romantic thing
it's cracked up to be)
"Why in God's name
would I have written that...?
Or as my wife says,
'Shut up, John'"

Then deep feelings, half-translated
Crazy miserable Riel
The girl murdered at Bloody Falls
Poor Harry's life
a lousy life, and it's only half over
Our disappointment lies in the world
as it is

The audience applauds and leaves
one or two lingering
for autographs and advice
and the English professor
escorting him out, saying
"When are you going to write
a happy poem
John?"

J.A.



Brecker and Jordan: new front-men needed?

Lukewarm Mingus

Mingus Dynasty
The Palms Cafe

review by Michael Skeet

I came out of Friday's Mingus Dynasty concert with mixed feelings. On the one hand, I was pleased and moved at having seen the creations of a major American music figure brought lovingly to life. On the other, I was disappointed with what I perceived to be a passionless, straight-from-the-charts rendering of said creations.

Charles Mingus' best music is characterized by strong, identifiable melodic lines and this was certainly evident in the material the band played this past weekend: the melodic lines from such classics as *Better Git Hit in Your Soul*, *Boogie Stop Shuffle*, *Peggy's Blue Skylight*, and *The Man Who Could Never Sleep* are still running through my mind.

The important thing here, though, is that these strong melodic lines were laid down to provide a base for extensive improvisation during the solos. With the

exception of a couple of dynamic inventions by pianist Sir Roland Hanna and the amusing antics of bassist Mike Richmond, the solos were rather uninteresting.

My chief complaint lies with the band's current front-men: Trumpeteer Randy Brecker and tenor saxophonist Clifford Jordan. The two seemed to be feuding at times throughout the night. Brecker missed a good many of the high notes he attempted during the late show Friday night, and Jordan couldn't even be bothered to hang around the stage when he wasn't playing.

Mingus was a man with very strong opinions, and not afraid to express those opinions. The music I heard Friday night was singularly lacking in any of the bite that was characteristic of the same music when Mingus led the date.

Charles Mingus' music should be kept alive, and a fluctuating Mingus Dynasty Band is as good an idea as any. Maybe it's time the membership was changed again.

More gloom from the crystal ball

Mockingbird
by Walter Tevis
Bantam Books 1981

review by Kent Blinston

"Reading is a subtle and thorough sharing of ideas and feelings by underhanded means.... the Teaching of Reading is equally a crime against Privacy and Personhood."

And in the 25th century that Walter Tevis brilliantly creates in *Mockingbird*, Privacy and Personhood are sacred.

Robots (with cloned human bodies) created centuries before the decline of technology, perform most of the work in society. They are usually idiots, capable of nothing above their assigned tasks. As they and other machines break down there is no one to repair them.

Humans have been raised in dormitories. Ignorant of reading, writing and arithmetic, they are trained in withdrawal and drug use. Their lives are a constant escape from annoying intellectual curiosity and painful emotional contact. Sopors and television (generally just changing colors and patterns) are their major diversions.

One man, Paul Bently, starts to climb out of this darkness when he learns to read. A professor of "Ignoring the Rest of the World" and "Fantasizing to Orgasm", he stumbles upon an ancient reading instruction film in the Ohio State pornography archives.

He takes his new skill to the dean of NYU, Spofforth. Spofforth is the greatest creation of Robotic Engineering, with human emotions, superhuman intellect and centuries of memory.

Spofforth assigns Bently to make recordings of the dialog of old silent films. The mental activity of this and of keeping a written diary makes Bently frightfully

aware of society collapsing around him. He experiments with not taking drugs and his awareness increases. Then he notices a more horrifying problem: there are no children. His is the last generation of man.

He meets another person who is trying to escape the darkness. Mary Lou is a tramp who hides in the zoo and is trying to "memorize her life." Because she does not take drugs she may be the last fertile woman on earth. Bently takes her to live with him and, like Adam and Eve, they taste the Knowledge of Good and Evil.



Paradise ends when the inscrutable Spofforth no longer needs Bently and has him sent to jail for reading and cohabitation (another serious invasion of Privacy). The survival of the human race, then, depends on Bently and Mary Lou.

Mockingbird is a haunting study of a society that parallels our own. When reading and all other mental exercise is discouraged people no longer think. They retreat into privacy and do not notice the world around them.

When drugged relaxation becomes the normal state, alertness and awareness become uncomfortable, even painful. The most chilling scenes in the novel involve Bently's struggle towards understanding.

The temptation to hide in the darkness is always strong.

Tevis' writing is subtle and skilled. He cleverly blurs the distinction between humans and robots and deftly reproduces Bently's growing ability to think. At times Tevis' satire is switchblade sharp, particularly in his examination of a group of fundamentalist Christians working from a Reader's Digest Condensed Bible.

The book has few flaws. A series of group immolations is never fully explored or explained and the decline of technology is occasionally too conveniently uneven. But the novel soars beyond minor complaints on the strength of Tevis' vision and his ability to express awakening thoughts.

Mockingbird invites comparison with *Brave New World* and *1984* and measures up well. A major difference between these classics and *Mockingbird* is that Tevis' society is not debased by oppressive government but by "individualists" and "Privacy." That message seems more appropriate for the children of the 70s.