

NDT plays provide a night of laughter

Review by Eric Peterson

"An Evening of Absurdity" at the Nebraska Directors' Theatre is wonderful, crisply performed fun. *The Actor's Nightmare* by Christopher Durang, *Krapp's Last Tape* by Samuel Beckett — not absurd or farcical, but a good, somewhat serious interval in the evening — and Eugene Ionesco's *Painting* are all good choices and are well and individually directed. They show at the Nebraska Directors' Theatre, 421 S. Ninth St., Suite 112, tonight and Saturday at 8 p.m.

The Actor's Nightmare, directed by Cassie Moore, is a nice companion piece to the Christopher Durang play, *Beyond Therapy*, showing at the UNL Studio Theatre this weekend. George Spelvin, played by Matthew Earl Reil, is an actor who finds himself in what would be a dream situation for many actors — he's wanted for too many parts. Reil and Cil Stengel, playing a production assistant, rush in from opposite directions.

George's astonishment increases when Sarah Siddons, expertly played by Lis Kerekes, tells him the play is not Beckett but Noel Coward. Their scene starts, Kerekes, at a fake balustrade, trying to carry on withering repartee with a partner who doesn't know the lines and wearing a period *Hamlet*

coat.

Kerekes is a pleasure to watch, with the forced theatricality appropriate to an actor playing an actor playing a tough socialite. Kerekes goes into a floating brittle laugh as she gamely tries to parry George's lame responses to her leading questions. Timing is the most important thing in a play of witty dialogue, and George is slowly sinking the ship. Stengel hurries in several times, dressed as a maid, to feed George his lines. At one point, she nods at the audience with the smile of perfect command — she knows her job even if the leading man doesn't.

Suddenly George discovers the play is *Hamlet* — audibly moans in agony, trips and scurries around to follow the spotlights of Hamlet's soliloquy, or tries to answer the speeches of Henry Irving, played by Tim Ganser. His own desperate speeches are mangled Shakespeare and reminiscences of his Catholic education — he's since given up religion for accounting.

George's confusion grows as even the other characters begin to warp; he finds himself not in *Waiting for Godot*, but *Waiting for Lefty* (it's political), playing opposite Pamela Kenney, who blithely reads her own stage directions. "Pause — smile — pause . . . He (Lefty) is exhausting. He's worse than Jane Fonda." This neo-Beckett is done

with George and his merry friend squatting in plastic garbage cans, George seeming to give up his resistance to what he hopes is only a nightmare. He now finds himself the Man For All Seasons, as Kerekes plays his wife and Stengel hilariously and woodenly reads her lines from a book, pedantic glasses on and pen in hand. The executioner Michael McAlister kicks apart a box to reveal the chopping block, and all cajole George into going along with the execution.

Krapp's Last Tape, directed by Lindsay Reading Korth, is Charlie Bachmann's virtuoso performance. Every action conveys the exhaustion and bemusement of the 69-year-old character, who has reached the point when he can throw his banana peels where he wants.

The short play moves from a comic opening to a more and more serious tone as Krapp listens to tapes he made on past birthdays, including one at 39, when he was at his intellectual peak — or so he felt then — but already was saying his best years were gone. Bachmann's derisive chuckling is the perfect commentary to the idealism or self-deceiving despair of his past. His constant switching of the tape at crucial points teases the audience and his building emotion as the tape goes on is moving. "The best years gone . . . I

wouldn't want them back. I wouldn't want them back."

Dean Baker's production of *The Painting* by Eugene Ionesco is a grand and strange adventure for someone who's never encountered the play before. It seems to reach several perfectly acceptable stopping places, then find new flights, until what matters in the senseless but very dramatic ending is the pure theater.

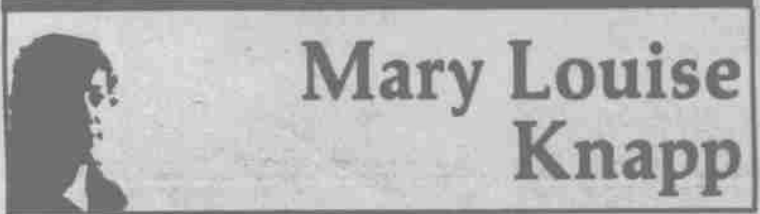
Charles Bell is grand as an industrialist who wants to buy the work of a painter played by William W. Korth. Instead of a pinstripe, the Large Gentleman is interpreted as positively sleazy, like an insurance salesman who preaches on the side. Bell's wide lapels, wide tie, wide open eyes and barracuda smile are, uh, sort of electrifying, as he chases the artist around the room in his rolling chair.

Alexis Reisig, as his sister Alice, has infinite contempt for the painting he gyps the painter of — which is, after all, only a sheet of tin foil. Reisig's voice gets a pretty scary ragged edge as she turns out to be the dominant one in a household obsessed with power. He shoots her and gets ready to shoot his neighbor, played by Joette M. Pelster, who giggles idiotically at the drama of it all. This is the play in which we get Ionesco's penetrating insight — "Art is the opium of the people; so is life."

Reagan leaks secret Mexican invasion plan

As the last exciting episode came to a conclusion, Celeste, Harley, Addison, Otis and Antoinette were eagerly awaiting the arrival of their guests, Ronald and Nancy. Today, we shall see what manner of people their guests really are.

"My dear Nancy, your dress is lovely," Antoinette said between mouthfuls of caviar. "I had no idea



Mary Louise Knapp

burlap sacks were in fashion at the White House this year."

Mrs. Reagan turned as pink as the boiled shrimp on her plate.

"Why thank you, Miss Chateaubriand," she said. "Actually, it's made of Japanese silk. But since you've spent most of your life, as I understand, in the outback of Nebraska, you may be forgiven your ignorance."

While Antoinette and the First Lady continued sparring, Celeste struck up a conversation with the president.

"It was very kind of you to attend our humble dinner, Mr. President," she said.

"I am honored to be in the company of such a distinguished opponent," the president said courteously. "You are certainly better looking than any of those Democrats. By the way, what party are you affiliated with? I was asleep when it was announced."

"Oh, I'm an Independent, sir," Celeste said. "Would you care for more wine?"

"No, I'm not a drinking man," he replied.

"Oh, that's too bad," Celeste said, pouring herself a generous glass of Chablis. "You're missing half the fun in life, you know."

"Madame Underwood," Reagan said earnestly, "I have followed your campaign sporadically since it began. Thus far, I am confused by your stand on several of the more important issues. In fact, it appears you have no opinion on foreign policy, nuclear arms, or apple pie. Can you enlighten me?"

"I am not fond of apple pie or nuclear armaments," Celeste said with dignity. "I think the country would be much better without them. As for foreign policy, I always say 'Never invade a country bigger than your own.'"

Reagan, mellowed by the Perrier and carrot sticks, chuckled warmly.

"Now that's the kind of attitude I like!" he said. "Well, maybe not your stand on our friend the bomb. We might be needing him when we send troops into Mexico next week — Oh, my! You hadn't heard about that? Our security system must be working pretty well."

Celeste concealed her shock behind several heap-

ing spoonfuls of potatoes au gratin. The president adroitly changed the subject.

"My dear, to what do you attribute your overwhelming and altogether unexpected success in politics?" he asked her.

"Well, mostly to the play ethic my parents taught me," Celeste said. "Whenever us kids bothered them too much, they told us to go out and play. I've been doing it ever since."

"You — you didn't get here by hard work?" Reagan said, feeling another cherished illusion crumble.

"Nope. Once I get into office, I'm going to encourage Congress to pass a law forbidding people to work more than six hours a week. The American people need to enjoy themselves! Of course, I'm going to push for free education for everyone, so they can use their leisure time properly."

Reagan looked more and more unhappy. "Didn't you ever see any of my movies. Or any John Wayne pictures? Not even one?"



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