

Review by  
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If the Omaha Studio Theater's recent production of Strindberg's *Dance of Death* is a sign of things to come, area viewers may expect not only highly experimental productions, but traditional interpretations of past masters which subscribe to methods and techniques indicative of dramatic art at its best: presenting the joys and terrors of life-conflicts in presentations which are the result of a balanced state of technical and aesthetic dramatic elements. The dramatic art of Strindberg is an excellent test for any director. Much of it is universal meaning through his imaginative efforts. The *Dance of Death* is such a play.

The theme of the play is vampirism. Edgar and Alice, both in late middle-age, draw life from those about them — Kurt, Alice's cousin and a family "friend," and their own daughter Judith and her young lover, Allan, Kurt's son. The vampirism may involve purely emotional matter, or, as is the case with Alice and Kurt, physical love; or, it may be limited to business affairs, as Edgar usurps Kurt's worldly possessions.

Edgar and Alice's characters may be interpreted as Strindberg's metaphors for human existence studded with the violent confrontations involved in forming bonds with other human beings, and with the great fear of being alone in a hostile universe. The result is a bitter struggle of individuals for what they hold precious.

Edgar is an aging officer,

bitter about the lack of appreciation of others for the strict discipline to which he has always held — this discipline is amoral and cruelly so, the audience finds out as the play progresses. Edgar is poor, so he drains Kurt's capital (while Alice is draining him emotionally and physically); Edgar is estranged from Alice, so he has a brief affair with Kurt's

## Midwest drama at it's best

ex-wife, whom he knows Kurt still loves.

Gene Driscoll as Edgar and Tom Adams as Kurt were both far more than sufficient in their roles, but neither had the nuance to fully complement the force and beauty of Lee Trudell's Alice. With impeccable diction, considerable power of presence, and controlled functional movement, her Alice was a demon-woman who alternately horrified and tore empathy from us.

Judith, Edgar, Alice's daughter, and Allan, Kurt's son, may be seen as metaphoric representations of the spiritual side of man. These characters capture the combination of ecstasy and despair which is that of the spirit of eternal youth and the rediscovery of self — a self

divorced from the physical. Diane Casker as Judith was exquisite and impressive; Larry French handled the difficult role of Allan with competence. Their flight from conflict-dominated presence of their parents was clearly representative of Strindberg's affirmation of man's existential possibilities through the spirit of love and art. Robert Neu's direction offered clean functional movement and a constant flow of action from scene to scene.

Sets, costuming and lighting complimented a soundly-directed and performed aura of action.

This production seems to me the best community theater I've seen in this area; and, since it is Neu's first production of the season, area viewers may look forward to other productions of this same high caliber. The short trip to Omaha is well worthwhile.

The next Studio Theater Production at Omaha will be a night of one-act plays, presented on Dec. 4-6, and 11-13.

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