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Studio Theatre play masterful

Review by Dennis Ellermeier

"A Deed From the King of Spain," which opened this Wednesday at the Studio Theatre, offers clear demonstration of UNL Professor Joseph Baldwin's capabilities in the craft of playwriting. The play was written in 1964 while Baldwin was in New York on a Woods Fellowship and was first staged earlier this year in New York City by the American Center for Stanislavsky Theatre. Baldwin directed this Studio production.

"A Deed From the King of Spain" recounts a few days in the lives of an east Texas family. The struggle of the individual characters is reflected in the loss of an estate and good reputation by the father 15 years before.

The late 1930s setting is masterfully created not only in the accurately detailed set and costuming by Diane Cernik and Carolyn Hull, but also with Baldwin's sensitive script and thorough direction.

Action 'leisurely'

The play concerns itself primarily with the examination of the circumstances in which the characters are found. The actual action of the show progresses in a pace almost Southerly in its leisure to an eventually explosive ending.

The six principal characters are considered from different aspects of bondage—Nadine in her bitterness, Octavia in her wheel chair, Enid in the stifling moral climate, Henry in his age and lost reputation, Jack in marriage and Charles in his obligations to clear the family name and repay his sister.

Baldwin reinforces this bondage theme in the development of such elements as the tall pines, religious domination, the town itself, Southern attitudes and the sameness of the set as well as a slow encumberment of the audience with the dreariness of the situation and few offerings of comic relief.

The dining room table is also used in a most magnetic manner. As a sort of central orb around which the events revolve, it stands as a reminder of the entrapment of the characters within the family circle.

Tense mugginess

From the melancholy piano overture by Liz Lewis, to the final desperate scene, the feeling of tense mugginess is hauntingly present. The general character of the drama is one in which the message is delivered dampened, not loud.

The actors in the production are generally new faces to large roles at university theater productions and it was most rewarding to see the depth of thespian understanding with which they acted. Each character had a good grasp of his role and few weaknesses were evident.

Of particular note is the casting of characters by physical appearance as well as ability. In this respect the show was beautiful.

The performances of Deb Miller as Nadine and Ann Perkinson as Enid are most laudable. Representing opposite poles, these sisters are portrayed with both controlled and lashed out tension.

Melissia Baer as Octavia and Doug Koth as Henry both made excellent response to the difficult task of young actors portraying aged and broken characters.

Two different aspects of southern gentlemen were well portrayed in the performances of Charles Krig as Charles and Greg Wagner as Jack.

Dialect handled well

All the actors handled the dialect with ease and it was perhaps this fact that lent the show its greatest credibility and authentic atmosphere.

As a production, the show was excellent, but the real star of the evening was the script and direction by Joseph Baldwin. His script is tight and well constructed and his control of his material is masterful. His use of devices such as parallels in the weather to the action, never appears gimmicky. From the first scene sultriness to a mid-show storm to a final fast clouds across the moon the weather worked in support of the scenes rather than obtrusively and independently. Perhaps if there is any flaw to this play it is that things are a little too well constructed and thus too predictable.

"A Deed From the King of Spain" will be performed tonight, Saturday and Sunday at 8 p.m. in the Studio Theatre.

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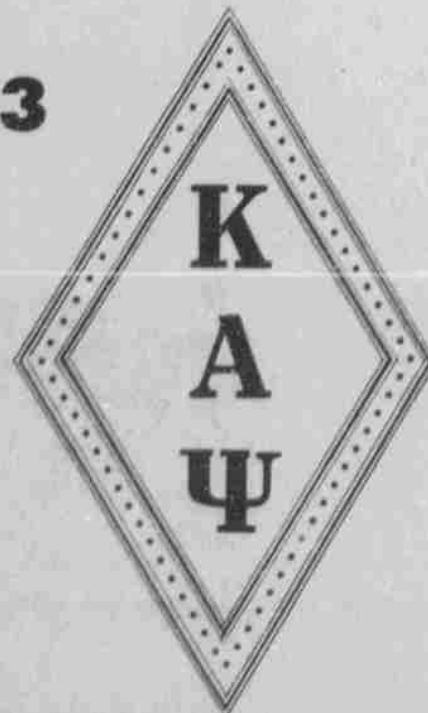
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