



In Pinter's *Old Times* Stephanie Kallos, Bill Kirk and Paula Langdon act in a plot with just a tinge of black comedy.

Photo by Scott Svoboda

Theatre

Actors give it their best but can't quite pull it off

Review by Charlie Krig

Harold Pinter has always had a feeling for expression. His plays use succinct, precise words carrying the barest essentials of the story.

The rest is up to the actors. Without a creditable cast, a Pinter play is made up of comfortable speeches and pauses. Such is the case with the current UNL Studio Theatre production of *Old Times* which opened Tuesday and runs until Sunday.

To set things straight, the actors in the show aren't bad—they just do not seem to be up to the rhythms and cadences of juicy Pinter dialogue.

Old Times has an interesting premise. A mysterious visitor, Anna, invades the complacent 20-year-old marriage of Deeley and Kate. The visitor is the wife's old roommate.

The resultant plot is a finely honed example of absurdist theatre with just a tinge of black comedy. The dialogue is full of Pinter's sensual style, especially in the lines concerning the trio's intimate relationships such as discussion of Kate's bathing habits, Deeley's recollection of how he met his wife, and Anna's stories about the women's years as roommates. Each of these are punctuated in the play with personal caresses and extreme body language.

Power struggle

The characters end up like the movie they keep talking about, *Odd Man Out*. These three people engage in a power struggle that goes far below the obvious levels and come up with more questions than they began with.

Deeley is extremely jealous of Anna who is trying to steal away Kate's affection and attention. He tries to pin Anna down to old incriminating stories about her past.

At the same time, Anna brings forth an animosity towards Deeley. Through plot development Anna's gestures toward Kate

may be more than a search for a forgotten friendship.

Then there's Kate. She is caught in the middle, between the friend she lived with 20-years-ago and the man who ultimately separated the two women.

In the true essence of Pinter writing, he leaves subliminal clues to nag at your mind and test the actors' abilities. In the play it is up to the actors to convey a certain outside emotion and still retain an underlying sense of sinister apprehension.

The cast tries hard but there is still something lacking. Bill Kirk as Deeley and Paula Langdon as Anna come close to fulfilling their characters, but neither one is complete. Stephanie Kallos as Kate has a more complex characterization but can not quite carry it off.

Long silences

With Pinter, every break in speech has a unique flavor which colors the rest of the dialogue. Since the *Old Times* cast is not in control of every moment, the pauses become nothing more than periods of uncomfortable silence during which the audience fidgets.

If some of the breaks seem a bit strained, the audience can use the time to study the technical aspects, which give silent emphasis to the play. The strange set and costumes (designed by Karen Brown and Sandy Moeller) have special significance that audience members will be able to relate to the struggle on stage.

Old Times may be a bit flawed, but the cast gives a strong attempt to master the play. Pinter is a difficult playwright to do well and the Studio Theatre has come up with a fairly good production. Instead of ruining an excellent play with a poor cast, there is a conscientious effort to finish with a creditable show.

The result is somewhat like one of Deeley's lines, "Old friends, always thinkin' spoke their minds. I miss that." The audience must look past the dialogue's face value and discover what psychological motives are prompting the characters' actions and speech in such extraordinary ways.

The Studio Theatre has taken on a tough playwright's work and the consequences are not total perfection.

arts and entertainment

Films

'Voyage of the Damned' is heavy going, stays in mind

Review by Will Huffman

On May 13, 1939, the eve of World War II, the German ship *St. Louis* left Hamburg with 937 passengers—all Jewish refugees fleeing Hitler's Third Reich.

The ship was bound for Cuba, where the passengers believed they would be allowed to disembark and subsequently make their way to the United States. However, the Cuban government refused to allow any of the refugees off and the ship was warned against attempting to dock at any American harbor by the U.S. government.

What the refugees couldn't know was that the entire trip was a propaganda scheme devised by Hitler's henchmen to prove to the world what a "problem" the Jews were. The Nazis knew only too well that no government would readily accept the refugees since most of the countries had more transients than they could handle.

This regrettably true incident is the setting for *Voyage of the Damned* (currently at the Plaza 4), a film documenting the journey of the *St. Louis* and the effects of the ordeal on its passengers.

High-powered cast

Populated with a distinguished and high-powered cast, *Voyage* is a lengthy but absorbing movie. It builds its power through a slow accumulation of details surrounding the many characters. The style is understated and sincere. The fact that we know the story is true makes it all the more involving.

The direction by Stuart Rosenberg is a bit pedestrian at times, but the nature of the story calls for a slow and deliberate pace. Screenwriters Steve Shagan and David Butler give the drama an urgent believability. They manage to capture the feelings of those 937 lives posed on the precipice, faced with freedom or death in a concentration camp as the final outcome.

The large cast requires the actors to define their characters vividly and quickly, and all prove more than equal to the task.

Among the "damned" aboard the ship are Lee Grant, as a wife trying to nurse her shattered husband (Sam Wanamaker) back to reality after he has been driven to mental collapse by the harassment of the SS. Oskar Werner is a prominent doctor no longer allowed to practice in Germany because he is Jewish. Faye Dunaway,

as Werner's wife, exudes a nervous charm as a woman refusing to accept lightly what fate has in store for her.

Caught in middle

Max Von Sydow's ship captain is one of the film's most interesting characters—an anti-Nazi German caught in the middle, he refuses to abandon his passengers and risks his own family to help save them.

The corrupt Cuban government officials are represented by Orson Welles, Fernando Rey, Jose Ferrer and James Mason, while Ben Gazzarra, representative of the Jewish League, struggles vainly with the reluctant governments.

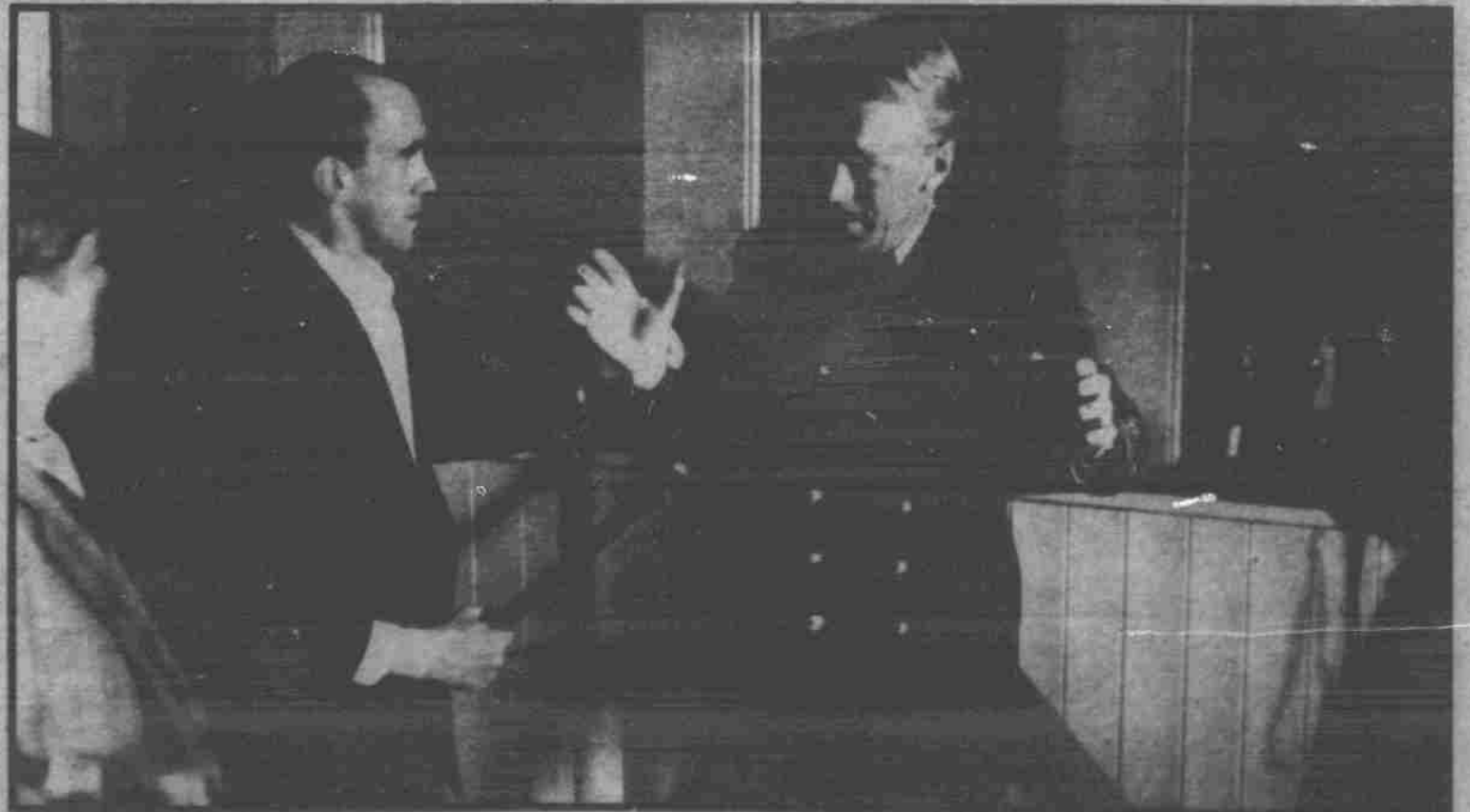
(Finally, Britain, France, Belgium and Holland break down and agree to accept the refugees, but many will

still perish as the Nazis begin to overrun Europe within a few weeks.)

Voyage of the Damned is heavy going most of the way. It's certainly not the answer for anyone looking for an evening of light entertainment. Watching the cruelly systematic degradation of human beings and knowing it's all true, can be a devastatingly depressing experience. No wonder the film stays in your mind long after you leave the theatre.

The disturbing questions persist: Why did we turn the refugees away? How can such inhumanity be justified? Could it happen again?

The agonized expressions on the *St. Louis* passengers' faces will remain with me for a long time to come.



Max Von Sydow, as the captain of the German ship, *St. Louis*, pleads with his Jewish passenger to trust him in a scene from *Voyage of the Damned*.

Photo courtesy of Avco Embassy