

Arts & Entertainment

'The Dresser' benefits UNL theatre projects

By Eric Peterson

"The Dresser," a backstage play by Ronald Harwood, is the current production of the Nebraska Directors' Theater. The play, which will be performed in the Temple Studio Theater Wednesday through Saturday at 8 p.m., will benefit both the Nebraska Directors' Theater and the UNL theater department's graduate assistantship program.

The Nebraska Directors' Theater is an independent project managed by eight master of fine arts candidates and one doctoral candidate of theater at UNL. It originally grew out of a class project, Tim Mooney, one of the project directors said. Theater department Chairman Rex McGraw made it a class project to go out and start our own theater, Mooney said.

The group rented space in the old Minnegasco building at 421 S. 11th St. "Since the department is strapped for space and there is a very strict schedule of plays, we found that we needed our own space," Mooney said.

Mooney said that an independent project like this has real advantages because they do not have to select plays with audience appeal and certain technical requirements as the primary considerations, like the UNL theater department sometimes has to.

Constance Hill, another director involved with the project, emphasizes the practical experience that the Nebraska Directors' Theater gives.

"We have to do everything," Hill said. "We know what it means to run the theater."

Teamwork essential

Working with the other directors is essential to the success of the theater, Hill said. "Each of us has a different concern for it — each of us has our own ideal of what we want out of it."

Being in the middle of things makes the project hard to evaluate at present, she said. "There have been a variety of frustrations and growths. It's hard to count our assets now," Hill said.

Most of the students involved with the independent theater will receive their degrees next spring, which means there will be a considerable turnover



in the project. Hill said she hopes the theater will be able to make the transition.

The project has been praised for its efforts. Larry Kubert, writing for the Lincoln Journal, listed two Nebraska Directors' Theater productions, "Buried Child" and "A Couple of White Chicks Sitting Around Talking," among the 10 best plays presented in Lincoln during the past year.

Actors, directors remain self-critical

Hill said that it is important for actors and directors to remain self-critical. "You have to ask, are we doing what we want to do?" she said. "If it's not working for you, it doesn't matter what Larry Kubert or anybody else says."

The first production the Nebraska Directors' Theater did was a one act play, "The Fencers," which was written by J. Stanley Haehl, a UNL theater student.

"A Couple of White Chicks Sitting Around Talking" opened in the new space on 11th street, and was directed by Alexis Reisig. Although it was not reviewed by any newspaper, Hill said that it was a strong production.

Mooney said not being reviewed can be as frustrating as being reviewed. "It's been almost a little political trying to get reviewed in a lot of ways," he said.

"Buried Child" an artistic success

For Mooney, "Buried Child," a play by Sam Shepard, was "our biggest success to date, at least artistically." The production benefitted enormously from a class in which innovative and creative rehearsal techniques were explored by using the play as basic material, he said.

The investment of time by all the directors is very great, Mooney said. Rehearsals of "Buried Child" often ran six to eight hours a day, and it could only be performed at 11 p.m., after some of the cast had finished their performing or stage managing in a UNL theater production of Goldsmith's "She Stoops to Conquer," he said.

"It was that experience that got us closer together and got us most artistically excited," Hill said.

Most recently, the theater did "A Voice of My Own," a vignette by Elinor Jones. Hill said "A Voice of My Own" is the kind of play the Nebraska Directors' Theater exists for.

"It's not a mainstage show," she said. "It's not going to be a Howell (Theatre) show." Yet, she said, it is an interesting play about what women writers throughout history have thought about their writing.

"The Dresser" will help relieve funding problems for both the independent theater project and the department's graduate assistantship program.

"All of our classes are overloaded," Hill said, adding that a large amount of the money which goes to hiring more assistants comes from box office receipts.

The play is "quite well-known," Hill said. "It's a nice vehicle for both Rex (McGraw) and David (Landis) as actors," she said.

'Salvador': Realizing the 'mechanism of terror'

"Salvador" by Joan Didion
Simon & Schuster (\$12.95)

Before reviewing Joan Didion's "Salvador" there are some facts that one should know about the author and her work.

A life-long resident of California, Joan Didion has written extensively of the hot and arid region. Two collections of her articles and reviews — "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" and "The White Album" — reveal her dis-

with Didion's past prose.

Was indifferent

In the past, Didion has displayed a glaring indifference toward the poor and oppressed. For example, the plutocratic heroine in "A Book Of Common Prayer" trivializes the poverty in her country while maximizing on the angst of her affluent cohorts.

The author's sojourn to El Salvador has apparently changed her perception of angst and dread. After witnessing senseless military tyranny (one afternoon she noticed a person being forced out of a shopping center with a gun to his back, and on two occasions she feared for her own life) she writes: "I came to understand, in a way that I had not understood before, the exact mechanism of terror."

"Salvador" is filled with brutal sense of irony which deviates from Didion's typically "smart" and distanced observations. At the shopping center where the civilian was apprehended by soldiers, Muzak was playing Don McLean's "American Pie" ("...singing this will be the day that I die...").

Yet the most eerie event to be chronicled happened when Roberto D'Aubisson, one of the leaders of a familiar right-wing death squad, granted an interview to a Danish crew that was shooting a film. No one was quite sure if D'Aubisson knew exactly what was going on. "The place brings everything into question," writes Didion.

Winning a beauty contest (Senorita El Salvador) becomes a matter of life and death since the big prize means a provisional "safe conduct" status for the winner and her family. Didion wryly remarks that the runners-up responded to losing with "less grace than is the custom on these occasions."

Not "the definitive text"

"Salvador," to be sure, is not the definitive text of the country's civil strife. It is not meant to be. One has to do some more reading on the subject, and Didion's book arouses the reader to do just that. Yet despite the author's

acute observations there are problems with her report.

For one thing, she does not question why the United States is supporting El Salvador's regime with money and weapons. In fact, she seems to think that our government has been unwittingly baited by anti-communist slogans. Most disturbing however, is the author's approval of isolating the "out-and-out" Marxists (as long as a broad-based coalition of moderate and center-left groups is supported). What should be done to these out-and-out Marxists once they are isolated? Furthermore, Didion concentrates on the more violent and episodic aspects of El Salvador's reign of terror while remaining oblivious to the more banal aspects of oppression which are just as devastating.

Nevertheless, the landscapes and portraits that Didion has painted in words should leave a lasting impression on the reader. Her impressionistic style has matured and she now writes with an expressionistic flair that recalls Picasso's "Guernica" (she refers to this masterpiece herself when describing the unfinished Metropolitan Cathedral in the country's capital of San Salvador).

The structure of "Salvador" is supported by various journalistic hardware: newsclippings from the popular media; reports from the American Civil Liberties Union and various human rights organizations; interviews with government officials from both countries (including provisional President Alvaro Magana and former Ambassador to El Salvador, Deane Hinton); and interviews with dissenters.

Finally, the reader will notice that the book begins with a well-known passage from Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," which ends with Kurtz's postscript: "Exterminate all the brutes," the current mandate of El Salvador's rulers. Joan Didion is to be commended for penetrating the heart of this hemisphere's darkness.

Peter Schmitz

Book Review

dain and pity for true believers (specifically those of the leftist persuasion), and film critics who are unable to penetrate Hollywood's social circles. On the other hand, she reserves praise for John Wayne, luxury hotels and lifeguards.

Famous for her candor concerning personal matters, Didion has written about her migraine headaches, persistent pangs of dread, and the results of a Thematic Appreciation Test which confirmed that she had a "fundamentally pessimistic, fatalistic and depressive" view of the world.

In view of Didion's corpus, one can understand why film critic Richard Corliss called her "the Empress of Angst." And it is quite obvious that she does not have the credentials of a radical. Therefore, "Salvador," a chilling indictment of El Salvador's right-wing military dictatorship, cannot be dismissed as propaganda from the left.

After spending two weeks in El Salvador in June of 1982, Didion has interwoven two powerful stories for this slim volume.

First, there is the visceral chronicle of what it is like to live in a small country where parking lots and playgrounds become charnels for mutilated bodies. Then there is the story which is not so visible to those who are not familiar

Local bars offer variety, entertainment

College students are back from vacation with summer job money in their pockets and thirst in their throats. Area bars have reacted by booking strong acts to lure the students off of the streets and back into the bars.

The Drumstick, 547 No. 48th St., has a strong lineup for the week. Wednesday, Model Citizens' Club, a new-wave band from Lincoln, will perform. Thursday, an Arista recording group, Ministry, comes to town, and the week is capped by appearances by Jason and the Nashville Scorchers Friday and Saturday nights.

Closer to campus, The Showcase, 1316 N St., will present legendary blues singer Koko Taylor and her Blues Machine Wednesday night. Thursday at The Showcase is the bi-monthly Comedy Shoppe, featuring local comedians and performers. The Morrells come to town for a two-night stint to round out the week.

The Zoo, 136 N. 14th St., is featuring the music of Magic Slim and the Teardrops all week. Magic Slim, a nationally renowned blues singer, was recently quoted by the Associated Press as saying he'd rather play the Zoo than any other club.

For those who don't have a taste for blues, McGuffey's, 1024 P St., features the Lincoln Jazz Society Thursday nights. Unlike most bars, McGuffey's does not have a cover charge.

Finally, for those whose tastes run more on the exotic side, the Aku Tiki Lounge, 5200 O St., is featuring a group called Levis and Lace. Briefcase is optional.