



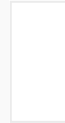
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Mating Them Up For Godot

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett at the Caravan Theatre Fridays and Saturdays at 9

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By **Pill Patton**,

December 1, 1972

JWAS APPREHENSIVE beforehand, having already heard that the Caravan Theatre's new production of *Waiting for Godot* turns Beckett's four lonely male characters into two married couples. So was the gregarious young New York actress I talked to outside, "It's the all too familiar spectre, so to speak," she said, attempting to swagger like Mae West, "of the question just what can and cannot be done with a play after it leaves the playwright's hands. Why someone went so far as to put on *Virginia Woolf* with an all gay cast. Albee went to court to stop it. I forget whether he won or lost but it could be seen that way you know..."

I was more worried about what had driven the company to undertake repairs on *Godot*. After just twenty years since its first performance, could the play that had so acutely formulated the "modern predicament" be wearing out, slowing down under the drag of over-familiarity, in need of rejuvenation? Could Beckett's spare masterpiece have become, along with Sartrean

AMAZING, REALLY, BUT ONE hardly notices the difference, "pronounced our actress at intermission." But Didi is just ridiculous. His face is so flat and pasty, and I have not once seen him change expression. I suppose it's because they had him have V.D. but it's still too much. Gogo is sort of bug-eyed, and Pozzo is all right but oh, Lucky is marvelous you know, the way she moves, and that silver tear they've given her..."

She was right. I was relieved. What Caravan has done can't harm a play that is broad and strong enough to make sexuality seem merely incidental. The graft doesn't take; the plant is healthier than ever. Jarring additions, such as Didi's case of the clap, or the segment where Pozzo and Lucky grope vainly boringly, Hairiedly for each other on the floor of the stage, are absorbed in the larger effort to deal with "the way it is on this bitch of as earth."

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It is a critical commonplace that Godot is a kind of abstract, modern Everyman, or Well-theater. In director Bobbi Ausubel's stagey production, the mechanics of living life are identified with those of putting on a play. Characters know just where they are: they wave away a too bright spotlight, carry around the portable tree, and once or twice stop out into the audience to make a comment like "I've been better entertained." The scene is the stage itself: the props represent little more than props. Like the characters, we are given very little information to go on. Getting, say, one's boots on and off, getting on and off the stage with some aplomb, getting up the energy to recognize or remember some fact of life—all become forms of the same problem-existence itself.

BOREDOM, OF COURSE, is the great difficulty, and the play's object must be to infuse some kind of interest and meaning into life, to fill the unforgiving span between the raising and the lowering of the curtain. That effort requires constant shifts in tone and attitude, from politeness to frenzy, from despair to humor. The characters, drawn together from a series of stock circus and stage types, continually try on roles, haggle over phrases and actions, force each other to react. To pass the time, they stage themselves, singing, arguing, lyricizing—and, in what emerges as the heart of the play, "thinking," the name they give to Lucky's rambling, semi-coherent but



skilful touch, a tinfoil tear passed on her cheek. Her graceful movements and the delicacy of her bright eye catch interest even when the center of dramatic attention is elsewhere. Her partner Pozzo is played by big, loud, ruddy Peter Kovner, who generates most of whatever energy comes on stage. Barbara Fleischmann's Gogo ranges from the ethereal distance of a Picasso saltimbanque to the pained goggling of a suicidal gypsy.

That, in this version of the tragicomedy, the comic elements are emphasized at the expense is due in large part to the weak performance of David Starr Klein as Didi. Excessively made up, with eyes that try to act their way out of an expressionist's face, he has trouble handling Didi's normal complement of philosophical musing. His flat intonation leaves the lines faintly perplexing, as if out of place, and the tension of waiting sags.

Director Ausubel has added one twist that does work: casting the envoy from Godot as a young girl, Rebecca Edelson, who shifts uneasily from one foot to another and absently caresses the stage's single tree as she delivers her message; Mr. Godot will not come this evening, but surely tomorrow, surely tomorrow...

CARAVAN'S INNOVATION is an addition, not a discovery. I still can't understand why they have tried it. Marriage is as good a way to go through life as the companionship of a couple of vagabonds, Beckett might say, but no more revealing. Nor is the change more than a passing nod to feminism: Lucky may wear Pozzo's leash around her thigh, but all four characters are too oppressed by life in general for that irritation to make much difference.

Some experiments like Caravan's succeed, some fail, and some don't much matter-this Godot falls into the last group. As much as it has been performed, explicated, and embroidered, Godot remains as sovereign and unfathomable as ever. "Godot?" said Didi, "he's a kind of acquaintance." "Nothing of the kind," replies Gogo, "we hardly know him."

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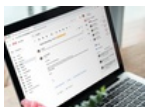
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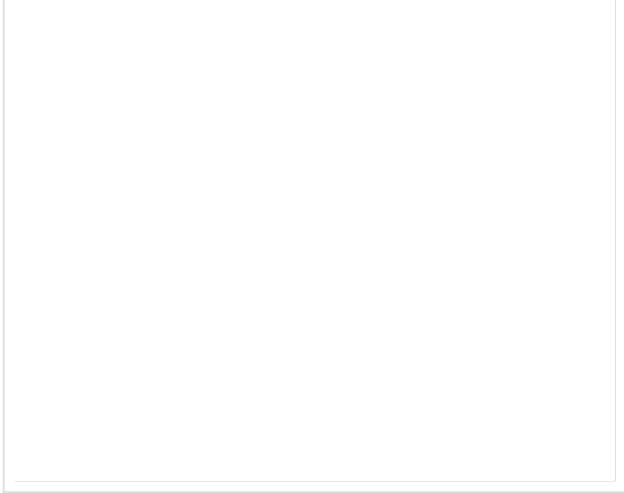


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