

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett
 Directed by Bobbi Ausubel
 Gogo Barbara Fleischmann
 Didi David Starr Klein
 Pozzo Peter Kovner
 Lucky Nancy Lovell
 Child Rebecca Edelson
 At the Caravan Theatre

The difficulty in writing about Caravan's *Waiting For Godot* is that it all sounds fine on paper. Playing Gogo and Didi, Pozzo and Lucky as "couples" makes for an intriguing production concept — unless it becomes the production *raison d'être*. Because when the poetic simplicity and the necessary rhythms of *Beckett's* play are sacrificed — as they have been at Caravan — to the tentative exploration of an interesting idea, then the production becomes more entertaining to talk about than to sit through. And that isn't good.

The marvelous thing about *Godot* is that it is not an existential treatise — or any other kind of treatise — but a play. An immediate experience. And instead of experiencing the Caravan production, I sat there coolly scrutinizing, thinking again and again, "Oh, I get it!" Having introduced sexuality into the already pregnant asexual relationships present in the play, the Caravan company proceeds to spend almost three hours and an entire production justifying their idea in terms of slightly jangled interpretations and complex countermotivations. And the audience must spend the evening ven-

turing sterile discoveries about what it all means.

In first place, the group still appears to be in a stage of experimentation with the script. Nothing flows. Delivery of the stark, poetic dialogue is jerky and self-conscious, alternating between an ill-fitting domestic naturalism (after all, it is a "marriage play" now) and a desperate, inexplicably choreographed clowning. Pozzo's famous "Man is born astride of a grave" speech is so compartmentalized, as if the character were groping for words, goaded by a thousand motivations, that the poetic essential, the frustrating truth of his words is lost. And this kind of floundering is not uncommon in the production. Whether it is the floundering of the actors whose footing is unsure or (I suspect) a deliberate interpretation of the script, it slows the play down to the point where I, for one, had plenty of time to wonder what in the hell Ms. Ausubel (the director) was trying to do.

If she intends to give us *Beckett's* *Waiting For Godot*, the mixed coasting may have been a mistake. The archetypal relationships are limited just enough that they cease to be archetypes and become clichés. Gogo and Didi, as played by Barbara Fleischmann and David Klein, are a kind of venomless George and Martha — he, the lonely philosopher and she, the sensuous bitch. Barbara Fleischmann takes the simple Estragon whose greatest concerns are his empty stomach and aching feet and makes him a bit of a shrew, a whiner. Didi's protection of his friend becomes not so much a given based on mutual need as a demand.

David Klein as Didi fares better than the rest — probably because, in the midst of all this self-conscious restatement, he is still playing the original Didi. His quietly understated, agonizing questions about why he has been given no socio/sexual overtones, and he doesn't bog them down with irritating character complexities. Klein presents Didi simply, he is a thoughtful man but not an imaginative one, he has questions but no answers. And his feverish note-taking on every supposed profundity that Pozzo utters is a lovely comic touch.

As to their marital relations, Gogo and Didi are centuries old. Sexuality is just a flicker in the eye of memory (brought on by painful urination perhaps the product of past indiscretions) and, as Gogo says, she either "forgets something immediately or remembers it forever." Just as well. I found such superimposed intimacies as the casual butt-rubbing on "Back to back like in the good old days" to be pushing the sexual thing. I kept expecting that if Godot ever did show up, he would turn out to be a marriage counselor.

The Pozzo/Lucky relationship has been subjected to considerable change at Caravan — some of which is theatrically quite workable. The circus entrance of highstepping Columbine tied to her barker by a velvet rope is certainly flashy, legitimate theatrics. Peter Kovner, the barker, plays Pozzo as the child/man, both dominant and dependent, churlish and childlike in his demonstrative bullying. Both Pozzo and Lucky are tied

to the rope, and as control shifts from one to the other, they take turns tugging.

Unfortunately, the Lucky and Pozzo of the script are completely taken over by this added dimension. The poignant spectacle of an old, exhausted man being forced to dance at the jerk of a rope is trashed for the spectacle of the young geisha, eager to please and captivate her master.

Caravan's *Godot* is by no means badly done. It is, I believe, an ambitious failure by a thoughtful group, not to be shrugged off as reasonless innovation or feminist posturing. The problem is that what may have been a provocative experiment for actors, director, even audience, is not — in the final test of performance — successful theatre. The entire production would profit tremendously from the economy that earmarks Klein's playing of Didi. There are so many interesting but insignificant little domestic dramas operating in conflict here that the "waiting for Godot" is relegated to the background. Some wrong choices have been made and, more importantly, not enough choices have been made.

Finally, it is significant that Beckett labeled the play "a tragicomedy." These human creatures, he implies, blindly clutching at the tatters of a not-so-mythic dignity, might be tragic if they weren't so damned ridiculous. So pitifully laughable. And there is a depth a pity in that final tableau of poor, simple Estragon with his pants around his ankles that, for all her talents, Barbara Fleischmann with her Lucille Ball wig, striped bloomers, and pretty legs simply does not stir.

CAROLYN CLAY
 BOSTON PHOENIX - BAD
 12/19/72

Caravan Theater's 'Godot'

It takes its time, but gets there

William A. Henry 3d
Staff

Nothing is funnier than "pinness," observes one Samuel Beckett's character pinned in the end-time of "Endgame." The remark is too self-conscious, too consciously in-ful, to be spoken by the helpless passive in Beckett's "Waiting for Godot." But the comic words offer a sharp edge in producing lucid but wholly irrational play.

Ever since the first production of "Godot" in 1953, producers, critics and actors of the work debated its basic conflict. The conflict was most emphasized during the original New York version, though which director, Schneider and star Lahr quarreled steadily.

Schneider insisted the play must be dark, somber, a note of lament. Lahr, convinced he found the music-hall humor in Beckett's scenes — the wringing on carrots, the comic squabbles between Gogo and Didi, the power games played by the literally bound-together Pozzo and Lucky.

Recent productions have varied more and more to Lahr's view. Caravan Theater's Bobbi Ausubel pursued the comic in "Godot" to its illogical extreme, and that company's current staging, running Fridays and Saturdays at 9 p.m. at 1555 Massachusetts av., Cambridge — must certainly

be among the most broadly burlesqued renditions the play has been given.

The Caravan effort only partially succeeds. The intensely physical playing ranges, as it ought, over a sweeping emotional terrain. But in place of the fine gradations of feeling, the subtle shifts from ribaldry to painful, poignant uncertainty, the Caravan troupe offers a grossly schematized approach in which large blocks of raucous slapstick about long stretches of whispered poetry only in the abrupt transitions from one major movement to the next.

Without the element of surprise, of life in the midst of emotional flux, "Godot" drones. The first act, almost an hour and a half of talk, seems interminable in a way that distracts from, rather than underscores, the ennui of the characters on stage.

The play, already long, is made longer by the intentional heavy-handedness of the physical scenes. A grotesque sort of wrestling match in the second act, in which the blind Pozzo struggles to his feet and is entangled in the limbs of Lucky, to whom he is roped and of Didi, who tries to help Pozzo up, lasts nearly 10 minutes.

In reality the confusion might go on that long, or at least seem to. But the Caravan's insistence on expressing the eternity of small moments, though faithful to the play's philosophy, is anti-theatrical

— and that failing is not faithful to the master comedian Beckett.

Despite shortcomings, however, the Caravan's "Waiting for Godot" is for the most part an entertaining, readily comprehensible evening. The company has wisely decided that the play is not about Godot (one could fill a long and dull book with theories about his identity), but about waiting.

That attack, which has more to do with what is in the text than with theories in the director's head, provides substance for the humor by making necessary and rational the aimlessness of Gogo's and Didi's stasis and of Pozzo's and Lucky's wandering.

Also noteworthy about Caravan's production is the casting of women as Gogo, the less cerebral and more earthy of the two tramps, and as Lucky, the slave (but in Caravan's version, nonetheless the controlling influence) in the sadomasochistic Pozzo-Lucky relationship.

The casting can be justified — both relationships are marital, if not necessarily sexual, in their intimacy and duration — but more significant is the fact that the male-female pairings scarcely alter the play's tone. The overtones suggested by the man-woman interplay are merely extensions of mind-body dichotomies and power relationship ironies evident within the text.

Caravan's players in the four principal roles are all more than competent. Peter Kovner's Pozzo, probably the best work he has done for Caravan, summons up everyman's anguished perseverance in his final scene, as he speaks Beckett's most fa-

mous lines about birth astride a grave and stumbles blindly off.

Barbara Fleischman's Gogo suggests at once the extremes of youth and age, her face reflecting both doll-like fragility and ultimate weariness. David Starr Klein is an unexceptionably thoughtful Didi, and Nancy Lovell's Lucky is a canny, alienated, shrewdly animal portrayal.

"Godot" was performed to sold-out houses its opening weekend, and is scheduled for an indefinite run. Caravan's decisive response to Beckett's "fundamental sounds made as fully as possible" deserves a lasting life.

The Boston Globe
(MORNING)

D. 261,042 SUN. 566,377

NOV 28 1972

New
England
Newsclip