

CARAVAN THEATRE

1555 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE • CAMBRIDGE, MASS. 02138

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'Hands Off!'

The Touch That Pleases

by Joe Gallagher

"Now just what in the world is going on here?"

That is precisely what the theatregoer might be asking as he or she watches *Hands Off!*, at the Caravan Theatre, 1555 Mass. Ave. These three plays, which will be shown Friday and Saturdays during the month of April, are extremely thought provoking.

These short works—two by Samuel Beckett, the other by Mrozek—are given a very competent treatment that is also audience pleasing. The audience is not scared away by the heaviness of the thought behind *Strip-tease* or Beckett's *Act Without Words II* and *Cascando*. The human element remains, and is well portrayed. The production is not geared solely for the intellect; it satisfies as more than just an exchange of esoteric ideas between the playwright and the "discriminating" audience.

This is due primarily to the performances of David Starr Klein and Joe Volpe. They work off each other as well as they do with each other. In *Strip-tease*, Mr. Klein and Mr. Volpe represent two opposed life styles and philosophies. This works and results in stylized, not hokey, portrayals. Both control the audience with their solo work in *Act Without Words*. Both are very competent performers, with Mr. Volpe displaying a bravura style and Mr. Klein a quieter technique.

They are ably assisted by Ms. Kathy Galluci and Ms. Aili Singer, who really don't get to do too much. Ms. Galluci does get to play a giant hand in the Mrozek piece (I promised I wouldn't make any puns).

The plays are well directed by Ms. Singer and Ms. Joann Green, who directs *Cascando*, the most difficult, and most rewarding of the three works. *Strip-tease* deals with how much control humans have over what they do in a comic vein (the aforementioned hand is in control.)

The first Beckett piece is a sort of

dour look at life as a useless task that people are prodded into. *Cascando*, if this viewer understood it, is a look into the mind of the writer, and his consolidation of his senses and sensibilities into an organic whole, by crossing the line. What lies on the other side of the line—faith, or self-knowledge, or just an end to worry, or whatever—is never clearly stated. By the time *Cascando* ends, however, a progression has been made by the author. It is a provocative piece, without being aggravating. It seems very abstruse, but is rewarding and enlightening as well.

But do you really want to go out to see Theatre of the Absurd, or Theatre of the Just Plain Silly? Other than to warn against that dread intellectual disease of Narrowness, I can recommend this production by the Caravan as good and entertaining theatre. The direction is very good, the pace never drags, the stark, simple set is quite effective, the costuming is interesting, and Ms. Barbara Bregstein provides some interesting, well-done piano accompaniment.

The atmosphere is intimate (polite for crowded), and the Theatre might benefit from better ventilation, but these are small complaints. The production is truly well done, and as mentioned, thought-provoking. It is not a circus sideshow, or an ingenuous pseudo-intellectual hodge-podge. A good deal of care went into this production, and it shows.

If you can take this sort of theatre seriously, go see *Hands Off!* Or, if you are the sort that gets a kick out of seeing a giant animate hand and don't care what it means, go see *Hands Off*. Either way you win. ■

THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT

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Caravan troupe provokes thought with three one-acts of 'Hands Off'

By William A. Henry 3d
Globe Staff

"Hands Off," the bill of three one-acts which opened as the Caravan Theatre in Cambridge this past weekend, is theatre which makes one think about theater.

All three pieces — "Striptease" by Slawomir Mrozek and "Act Without Words II" and "Cascando," both by Samuel Beckett — belongs to the avant garde movement in vogue 10 to 15 years ago.

As observations on the nature of the drama, all three plays deserve at least passing attention, and the Caravan stagings point up rather well the literary and dramatic questions the plays propose.

The three pieces are perhaps more interesting now, in retrospect, than they were originally, for it is easier to sift out thought from chaff. All three playlets make some commentary on stage conventions, but only one is a consistently interesting and valid piece of craftsmanship.

Beckett's "Act Without Words II" is a gem of non-verbal theater. Its action is simple. Two men lie in

dressings, eat, exercise, ap-sacks. Each in turn arises, peers to have sex, undresses, goes to sleep. One is sluggish, hesitant, prevarious, seemingly metaphysical. The other is brisk, unquestioning, physical. But for both the daily ritual is the same.

"Act Without Words II" may not, strictly speaking, mean anything, but it is a striking series of visual images, and the action is always unambiguous (unlike the stream-of-consciousness poetry which is the characteristic language of Beckett's shorter plays.)

Perhaps most appealing of all, "Act Without Words II," as correctly executed by Caravan, does not succumb to the speeded-up chronology of verbal theater. The actors feel no compulsion to perform each action as quickly as possible, so as to keep up the pace of the play. Each individual movement is enacted precisely, and at its own inherent speed.

The other two plays, both of them far more verbal, are less fun to see and to hear. "Striptease" might best be described as menacing pop art.

Two men, an executive type who spouts sophistry about freedom and a union agitator who is a plain-spoken man of action, find

themselves trapped together by a giant "hand of force." They are knocked down, toyed with, stripped and shackled. After total degradation, culminating in blindness, they are let go.

While its mock-melodramatic "hand of force" is amusingly unreal, "Striptease" is very talky, the characters do not develop in subtlety beyond the active-passive dichotomy, and the Caravan actors drone at times. The production would have profited substantially from greater variations in pitch and pacing of the internal sub-scenes.

"Cascando" is a play about three clowns, one who talks, one who emotes "music," and a third who controls the others. The actors — Joe Volpe, David Klein, and Alli Singer — are inventive, and the implied superiority of non-verbal communication is intriguing, but the text demands close literary analysis rather than performance to make any sense at all.

For all its vagaries of style and sense, however, "Hands Off" is provocative entertainment.