

Opening Night Ghost Sonata: Challenge Well-Met

By ALAN SLUTSKIN
Collegian Drama Critic

Wednesday evening I walked into the University Theatre prepared to review the opening of a great play. My task was somewhat easier than that of a critic reviewing a new production because "The Ghost Sonata" is already established as a modern classic and one of the literary world's finest contributions to expressionism. This short lived advantage was soon balanced by the fact that the level of production was university rather than professional.

In attempting a successful presentation of Strindberg's extremely deep rooted message involving reality and illusion the University players accepted quite a challenge. This challenge was met at many different levels of achievement: some very low and some approaching perfection, but all an extremely worthwhile experience for everyone involved.

Robert Breuler to borrow an old Broadway cliché, walked away with the show! His dynamic presence on stage makes the most uninformed theatergoer feel sorry for any actor who has to play opposite him. Most salient to "The Ghost Sonata," however, was his interpretation of Strindberg's entire theme. Breuler was overwhelmingly successful in his transitions from reality to illusion, an aspect of necessity that seemed to have escaped the rest of the cast entirely.

Karen Shallo, in her portrayal of the mummy, came closest to achieving the height of perfection that seems to be second nature to Breuler. With the exception of sporadic lapses, she too seemed to understand Strindberg's exclamation that reality is only manifested in the inner self. Greg Smith, as Johansson, and Donald King, as Bengtsson, although not faced with quite the challenge of interpretation as the principals, did excellent jobs.

At this point the level of achievement is lowered noticeably, and all that remains is the who and the why. Richard Wicand, after a tremendous performance in last term's production of "Woyzeck," wasn't up to par this time around. In his one highly significant interchange with Breuler it seemed as though he completely failed to see the significance of Strindberg's carefully constructed lines.

With the lowering of the curtain on Act II comes the death of Mr. Hummel, Bob Breuler's identity. I remember hoping sincerely that this would not also be the death of a play, but my misgivings were soon confirmed. In Act III those in the audience who have not as yet comprehended

Strindberg's message have it handed to them on a silver platter through the dialogue involving the student, Robert Barber, and the Hyacinth Girl, Mary Pickering.

Strindberg built this act around those two characters in such a way that only a magnificent performance by the student and a complement of good performances by the student and the girl could have carried the play. Miss Pickering, however, was merely adequate, and Barber was a great disappointment. As a result of his synthetic performance and the impression that he gave of reciting his lines, the last act dragged slowly along and much of the impact of the author's insight into the nature of man was lost with the tempo.

With the exception of the music written especially for this production of "The Ghost Sonata" by James Case, the play was a great success from a technical viewpoint. Vincent Piacentini's set design provided the naturalistic atmosphere that was an integral part serving to reflect Strindberg's question of what is reality and what is illusion. Herbert O'Dell's lighting design was beautifully accented by the shocking appearance of the dead man, and Phyllis Kress' design of costumes did everything possible to heighten the illusion achieved. "The Ghost Sonata," however, was not originally accompanied by any score and its addition in this case seemed entirely superfluous. It commended as serving any purpose at all, this would have to be attributed to the direct parallel it drew to "Death of a Salesman" where the insertion of a few musical bars signals the vascillation between illusion and reality.

Lowell Manfull, the director of "The Ghost Sonata," said that his main objective in this presentation was to bring out Strindberg's belief that hidden reality is real reality and that the trouble lies in distinguishing between reality and illusion. In this endeavor I truly feel that he has succeeded.

Manfull, reflecting his responsibility as an astute director and a fine educator, presented his cast with a challenge. Some rose to the occasion and distinguished themselves, some encountered one of the many stumbling blocks on the way to the utmost development of their talent, but I reserve no doubt that all have profited and will return with still another contribution to that which they love; the theatre.

Nickelodeon Nites: 'Rare Bargain'

For the past three years Michael Radis has headed what some consider one of the best bargains in the University has to offer—Nickelodeon Nites.

For 25 cents admission, Radis brings out campus comedians such as W. C. Fields, Laurel & Hardy, Charlie Chaplin, and a host of other silent and early talky film stars.

Fred Haupt at the piano provides the authenticity of the original Nickelodeon.

In addition to the regular comic shorts, there is plenty

of free popcorn and a serial which runs for the term. "Dangers of the Canadian Mounties" is this term's cliff-hanger.

Nickelodeon Nites also presents one feature film each term. Lon Chaney in "Phantom of the Opera," perhaps the top horror flick of all time, will be shown next Friday.

According to Radis the 1925 classic is in color. "But it's not color as we know it. The entire frame periodically changes to a tinted color for dramatic effect," he said.

On June 9 Nickelodeon

Nites will present a four hour special free to the public on the Hertz Union Building lawn.

"Next fall marks the 50th performance of Nickelodeon Nites," Radis claimed.

Those who wonder how long the film supply will last, need not worry, according to

Radis. "The supply is almost inexhaustible. We haven't gone through half the catalogue yet. And the firm where we rent the films continually adds to its stock," said Radis.

Nickelodeon Nites is presented each odd-week in the HUB assembly room.

'Cinema X' To Feature Classic American Films

Cinema "X" becomes Cinema "A" at 7 p.m. Sunday at the Wesley Foundation with a double feature of American films, "The Big Sleep" and "Caught."

Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall star in their toughest of the tough private-eye melodramas, "The Big Sleep," directed by Howard Hawks from a screenplay by William Faulkner and Raymond Chandler.

"Sleep," for the benefit of the Bogart-Bacall cultists, is the one in which nobody has ever figured out just why one of the nine murders occurs, and in which Bogart and Bacall have the unprintable conversation about fillies crossing the home stretch.

"Caught" is a James Mason vehicle, and possibly the only film in which he not only gets the girl, but also doesn't drink himself to death. The film also stars Robert Ryan and Barbara Bel Geddes and was directed by Max Ophuls.



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Westmoreland To Confer With Johnson; Address Congress

WASHINGTON (AP)—Gen. William C. Westmoreland conferred with President Johnson and other top administration officials yesterday as he prepared to present a commander's eye view of the Vietnam war to Congress and the nation's governors.

The four star general is due to brief the governors at a White House session and address a joint meeting of Congress at the capitol today.

His day long round of meetings began with a 7:30 a.m. session at the Pentagon and proceeded through a forenoon conference with Johnson at the White House.

Government Leaders
Presidential Press Secretary George Christian said among the others present were Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and Gen. Earl G. Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Christian gave no details of the discussion.

In between conferences during the day Westmoreland, who commands U.S. forces in Vietnam, did some editing and

polishing of the text he will deliver at today's appearance before the Senate and House.

He is the first commander to leave an active war theater to address Congress. Other top military leaders have appeared before the legislators in different circumstances.

In 1945, at the end of World War II, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower and Adm. Chester Nimitz addressed Congress but the fighting in their respective theaters of operation had ended.

Gen. Douglas MacArthur was a guest speaker in 1951 after President Harry S. Truman relieved him of his command in Korea.

New Interest
Westmoreland's speech has taken on new dimensions of interest in the wake of a controversy stirred up this week by his address at the annual meeting of The Associated Press in New York Monday.

Congressional critics of the administration's war policies charged that Westmoreland's appeal for support of the war effort was aimed at stifling debate.

Westmoreland's address is expected

to be mainly a progress report on the conflict summing up what the United States has achieved since the Southeast Asian buildup began two years ago.

Among others he was scheduled to see during the day was Arthur J. Goldberg, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. He also was booked for what the Pentagon called informal discussions with individual members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

No formal meeting of the joint chiefs was scheduled.

Additional Manpower
There has been some speculation that Westmoreland would present a new bid for additional manpower in Vietnam, but sources say the general probably will avoid any specific statement on numbers of troops which might be needed beyond the presently planned year end total of 470,000.

However sources said Westmoreland might indicate to Congress that there are additional military operations which he could conduct if he is given additional troops.

Solera Helps Revival of Magazine

Rodrigo Solera, assistant professor of Spanish, will participate in a special meeting tomorrow aimed at reviving publication of the "Hispanic American Report."

The session, called by the California Institute of International Studies, will be held at Stanford University and be under the direction of Professor Ronald Hilton.

A number of American Universities have been asked to help Hilton organize the undertaking, and Solera, a recognized expert in the field of Latin American studies, will represent Penn State.

The "Hispanic American Report" at one time served as the most important publication ever to appear in the United States on current events in Spain, Portugal and Latin America.

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TIM TALKS

To Town Men and Freshmen:

The Town Independent Men's Council elected its five officers for next year on April the twenty-fourth. They are elected exclusively by the present TIM Council and must be on Council now to run. They need not be re-elected to Council next year to preside.

This means that the Councilmen who won't be here next year get to vote but next year's new councilmen, (the people they will lead) will not. Also, since the new councilmen can't run for office their first year on Council, the resources and representation from which they are drawn are not the five thousand (or so) Town Men, but the dozen or so carryover Councilmen.

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