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CSU students find humor in unhappiness

by LIANNA SALVA
The Rocky Mountain Collegian

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last edited: 12:55 am 04/21/2011

figure remains unmoving for a full 20 minutes before the stage lights go down.

Blue light filters through missing window panes from above, slightly illuminating the figure as well as another sheet covering a rectangular structure.

Michael Toland, who plays Clov in CSU's production of Samuel Beckett's "Endgame," enters the room, hunched over and humming to himself.

"Endgame" takes place in a post-apocalyptic world. The house, where Clov is a servant to Hamm, played by Tim Garrity, sits on a beach where nothing else remains except for a grey sky, a grey sea and a grey earth.

Clov whips off one of the sheets revealing two trashcans, making a small cloud of dust fly into the air. These two trashcans are the homes of Nagg and Nell, Hamm's elderly and legless parents, played by Tony Vessels and Kelly Oury, respectively.

Garrity, Oury and Vessels remain in the same positions for the entirety of the play. Toland is the only person on stage with the ability to walk, but not to sit.

This contradiction, and many others, is what embody Absurdist Theatre such as "Endgame."

"I do enjoy being the only character who moves because I like being able to explore the stage," Toland said.

Throughout the play, the four characters go about their daily routine and ponder their circumstances. Cynical comedy

and metaphorical philosophies intertwine with Hamm and Clov's repetitive banter. The highlight of their day is when Clov discovers a flea in his pants. Apparently, fleas do survive the apocalypse.

Although the four students in this production are in their late teens and early 20s, they are transformed into elderly and grouchy shells of human beings. This proved as a challenge to everyone involved.

"The lighting is so dim, so we have to do the makeup so bold," said costume and makeup designer, Eleanor Duffy.

"The same with the colors in the outfits. I can't put them in bright colors because it's the end of the world, but if I put them into a darker color, you can't see it," she said.

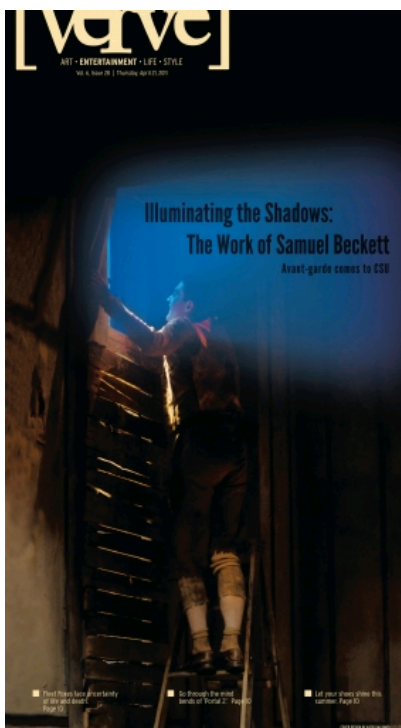
Nagg and Nell, although complaining for food continuously, share intimate memories of life before the apocalypse. Nagg tries to lighten the mood by telling jokes for Nell's benefit.

Oury explained that the challenge for her character's voice was differentiating between life and on the verge of death.

"Playing a character that's so old, because I'm not, is hard but Nagg jokes around a lot and I'm relatively laid back and make jokes," Vessels said.

CSU Beckett Center

"Endgame" and other Beckett performances at CSU are provided through The Center for Studies in Beckett and Performance, founded by "Endgame" director Dr. Eric Prince, who is a Beckett scholar.



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"I came to CSU by accident," Prince said. "I was working in Yorkshire in a very nice college and I went to a Beckett conference in Canada."

There, he met Wendy Ishii and Laura Jones, both theater professors at the UCA. He was invited to CSU to direct one of his own plays, written in a Beckett style. Prince took his passion for Beckett's work and teaching and applied them to CSU and the Fort Collins area.

In the fall semester of 2008, The Center performed for more than 1,100 students of the Poudre School District in a specially adapted and interactive bi-lingual project.

"Mostly the students see you as a teacher in the classroom, but they don't often realize that's only a part of our work, especially in the undergraduate level," Prince said. "The other side of the picture is that there's an obligation as academics to keep our own creativity and research alive."

Beckett's plays, and many others that The Center encourages, are not just for entertainment but are for showing the playwright's vision.

Prince is not only a professor and director but also a playwright. The Center encourages other works that challenge contemporary theater.

"I didn't want the center to be exclusively for Samuel Beckett, but be a means for expanding his spirit, which comes out in the fact that he wrote plays that was like nothing else before them."

Students can get involved with The Center by auditioning for performances, working on set, and writing plays in a Beckett style and presenting them to The Center.

"It's nice to pass the baton and hope that other young people become inspired," Prince said.

The final performances for "Endgame" are tonight through Saturday at 8 p.m. at the UCA in the University Theatre. Tickets cost \$9 for students and \$18 for the general public. Advanced purchase is highly recommended and can be done at csuarttickets.com.

Staff writer Lianna Salva can be reached at verve@collegian.com.

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