

Bend it like Beckett

Pale Blur Productions, Vocalypse handle Irish playwright's works superbly

By STEPHEN PEDERSEN Arts Reporter | THEATRE REVIEW



Janice Jackson and Tim Leary are performing one-person Samuel Beckett plays, *Not I*, and *Krapp's Last Tape*, in Bus Stop Theatre, Gottingen Street, Halifax, nightly at 8 p.m. to Sunday. There is also a matinee Sunday at 3 p.m. For tickets call 429-1797. (TIM KROCHAK / Staff)

Beckett's genius was his instinctive theatricality, the exquisite sureness of his dramatic pace, and his sense of humour which made you howl with laughter at situations that were recognizably full of pain and suffering.

When Irish playwright, novelist and poet Samuel Beckett burst into the limelight with *Waiting For Godot* in 1952, he left play-goers with their mouths hanging open.

They couldn't make sense of his circular dialogue, of why Estragon and Vladimir kept saying they couldn't leave because they were waiting for Godot, and who Godot was anyway.

At the same time, as you left the theatre feeling more or less resentful that you had been deprived of resolution and annoyed that the conflict on stage introduced in the first act was still going on after the curtain fell on Act Two, you were also nagged by the feeling that Beckett's strangeness was somehow even more annoyingly familiar.

Pale Blur Productions in association with Vocalypse presents two short Beckett one-handers in Bus Stop Theatre nightly at 8 to Sunday. They are *Not I* (written in 1972) with Janice Jackson, and *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) with Tim Leary. They are superbly done.

Watching these two theatrical gems, you soon come to know the reason for the familiarity of Beckett's absurdities. It was and is an absolutely precise photograph of your own mind as — most often during a sleepless night — it races around out of control, dredging up the past, mixing memory and fantasy, mercilessly holding you captive as you toss and turn.

Beckett is absolutely faithful to this tormenting vision in which the banal and the divine, the sacred and the secular, stream through our consciousness while his characters, who are ordinary people (in short, you and I), who are often not particularly bright, and who are certainly not intellectual, consistently fail to establish a firm border between the two realities: that on the outside of your skin, and that within.

It's a razor's edge. And the more of Beckett you read or watch, the more you marvel at the consistency with which he walked it. He does not let anyone, not you, not I, not his actors, not his readers, and finally not even himself, off the hook.

In *Not I*, an aging woman in her 70s babbles on about her life as though she was talking about someone else. As Janice Jackson, only her mouth lit in a tiny spot of light near the top of the back stage wall, delivers this monologue in an astonishingly low, often vehement voice tinged with a Cape Breton Irish accent, you realize that you have seen this woman on a busy city street more than once, talking out loud to herself, sometimes halting and gesturing violently as pedestrians stream by her on either side.

If you suffer from myopia, as I do, even though corrected, you may not be able, despite the hot lighting, to make out the details of Jackson's mouth moving on the dark stage (the character's name, incidentally, is just that— Mouth). I recommend a pair of opera glasses. Anyone with normal vision will have no trouble at all with this

rather striking bit of stagecraft. But so eloquent is Jackson's mastery of tone of voice, and so fine is Beckett's writing, you get it anyway.

Tim Leary, who directed Jackson in *Not I*, plays the part of Krapp in *Krapp's Last Tape*, directed by Richard Donat. Like *Mouth*, Krapp is also old. His clothes are loose and baggy, his face sags, he seems so tired he is almost at the end of his strength, and he shuffles through the rituals of his day in well memorized order.

They mostly consist of eating bananas and listening to tapes of his younger self though he occasionally trudges off stage where we hear corks popping and liquid pouring.

Krapp locates a tape he made at the age of 39. He can barely stand to listen to this garrulous reminiscence about a woman he can hardly remember except for her eyes. Krapp's memories are full of self-loathing.

Eventually Krapp shuts off the tape recorder after fruitlessly attempting to add something current and meaningful to it. The message is clear. It's all crap.

Beckett's genius is to show us, with humour, that there is something real going on in this experience of our inner lives, which is beyond the power of words to express. More than any other playwright I know, Beckett, like Shakespeare, holds up a mirror to the nature of 20th and 21st century human experience.

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