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# The Mirror Images of Beckett's Endgame

Sylvie · Wednesday, May 11th, 2016

There is a double and nostalgic meaning in this title, certainly as Samuel Beckett intended it, but even more so as it pertains to the current production of *Endgame* at the Kirk Douglas Theatre.
The part of Nell is shared by Anne Gee Byrd and Charlotte Rae, which makes this a cast of five instead of four. Three of the five are over 80 in individual age. Make that over 85, as one of the three will be celebrating an 85th birthday next Thursday. However, the production is not a geriatric contest. On the contrary, it is a chamber concert for four human instruments. All possess indelible talent and determination that work hand in hand to create memorable theatre. Result: this production of *Endgame,* directed by Alan Mandell, who also plays the pivotal role of Hamm, is a gem.
Performed with Barry McGovern as Clov, James Greene as Hamm's father Nagg and the Byrd/Rae combo sharing performances as his mother Nell, this *Endgame* is at once a landmark and a heartbreaker, bearing all the Beckett imprimaturs marking the maddening diurnal nature of life as the thing we cling to no matter what — and as a deliberate cosmic joke played on us all.

l-r, Alan Mandell and Barry McGovern in ?*Endgame.?*

If anyone really knows this play well, it is Mandell, who had a lifelong professional relationship with the playwright and appeared in both *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot* under his direction. As the program will tell you, Mandell recreated Beckett's direction for the filming of *Endgame* and performed in the play in Dublin, London and Italy. He has made a point of stating that he would not have mounted *this* production if he had not been able to secure the cast or design team he wanted, this one headed by John Iacovelli, whose fortress-like setting speaks of the prison of the body we inhabit, and Jared A. Sayeg's indeterminate lighting reflecting the penumbra that circumscribes that life. It is all one bleak, deliberate greyness.

Charlotte Rae in ?*Endgame.?*

McGovern, who was Vladimir to Mandell's Estragon in director Michael Arabian's exceptional production of *Waiting for Godot* at the Taper a few years ago, is now playing the exasperated servant/partner Clov to Mandell's Hamm. Clov here is the more specific foil, the tyrannized slave in the folly of superannuated relationships that paralyze the will, making both parties crazy.
Greene's Nagg and Rae's Nell (she was in the role the night I attended) sit throughout the performance in the forced isolation of age in their respective dustbins. (Ready to be tossed out?) The first question for Nagg out of Nell's mouth after Nagg knocks and she sticks out her head is, "Time for love…?" Spoken in a tiny, hopeful voice, it is an unbearably poignant query, since she

and Nagg are unable to kiss, but can only wait for life itself to just end.

Charlotte Rae and James Greene in ?*Endgame.?*

The hidden parallel in all this is that actors can work until their memory or their bodies give out. They may do film a while longer, but the stage insists on a level of here-and-now energy and concentration that is enormously demanding. So another reason for paying close attention to this production is that this exceptional cast moves us in two ways: by the value and distinction of its effort, but also by the deeply knowing words it speaks.

It may be a very long wait before such a twin achievement is attained again.

*Top image: AlanMandell (seated) & Barry McGovern in Beckett's* Endgame *at the Kirk Douglas Theatre.*

*All photos by Craig Schwartz.*

**WHAT: *Endgame***

**WHERE:** Kirk Douglas Theatre, 9820 Washington Blvd., Culver City, CA 90232.

**WHEN:** Tuesdays-Fridays, 8pm; Saturdays, 2 & 8pm; Sundays 1 & 6:30 pm. Through May 22.

**HOW:** Tickets: $25-$55 (subject to change) available at http://www.centertheatregroup.org or at 213.628.2772 or in person at the Ahmanson Theatre Box Office downtown or at the Kirk Douglas Theatre box office two hours before performance. Hot Tix: $25 each may be purchased in advance or, subject to availability, on the day of performance at the box office (no checks). Groups: (213) 972-7231. Deaf community: information and charge, visit CenterTheatreGroup.org/ProjectDATE.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, May 11th, 2016 at 11:11 am and is filed under Theatre, Fiction, Visual Art

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