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UAF One-act plays devoted to unconventional theater

by Glenn BurnSilver

FAIRBANKS — A set of unconventional stage performances featuring works from esteemed writers David Hare, Samuel Beckett and Romulus Linney opens tonight at the Salisbury Theatre.

The plays, “The Bay at Nice” (Hare), “Play” (Beckett) and “Can Can” (Linney), have slightly overlapping themes connected to issues of remembrance and longing. Interpersonal love and fidelity plays into all of them, yet none are scandalous.

“It’s about what confronts us as we imagine what it is to be faithful to ourselves and others, in an ethical and philosophical sense,” director Stephan Golux explained.

Golux noted that a minimalist quality — including staging and character intricacies — pervades each play, an element that enticed Golux to match the three in one setting.

“There was an opportunity to work on plays that have very unconventional structures,” he said. “I thought, ‘How can we bring together plays that are thematically similar, but very different in the way they handle theatrical abstraction, which is more about their form than

what they are about?’

“There was a way to make this a theatrical event that was about the nature of theater itself,” he continued. “I think that the experience of people coming to watch it will not be unlike going to a short-film festival where you are able to get a small bite sample of things. It is more about form than content.”

“Can Can” opens the show with four people — an ex-GI, a French girl, a Nashville housewife and an older country woman — scattered on the stage. Each represents a different place and time, yet the four connect in their desperate tales of love.

“The idea isn’t to evoke these four different places,” Golux said. “The idea is to eventually give (the characters) a generic platform from which to speak,” so the words bely stronger inner meaning.

Beckett’s “Play” follows a similar path, as three characters once caught in a love triangle reflect on their inherent loneliness. Beckett added intensity with a barren stage, Golux explained.

“The design is very minimalist, but it is very, very critical to what the play is about,” he said. “There’s a bit of a visual joke in-

volved, but there is a more of a visual minimalist feast. It will allow you to focus (on the story) in a very narrow way.”

“The Bay at Nice” follows a more complex storyline. Set during 1950s Russia, Sophia aspires to a bourgeois lifestyle, but instead feels oppressed by the drudgery of Cold War-era Soviet life. She wishes too to escape her domineering mother, who Sophia must meet at the run-down Hermitage Art Museum in Leningrad to help authenticate a painting. The two are forced to deal with their love and anger for one another in a society that offers no escape.

Golux said the set vaguely represents the museum, but only enough to allow the characters to remain the focal point.

“We’re rendering an abstraction of (the museum) in a way that you can see through the walls of these rooms so you can see these people interacting with one another,” Golux said. “It’s done in what we call forced perspective. The design makes you feel as if the space is bigger than it is.”

While the playwrights created snappy, sharp dialogue, Golux added, their plays are not so much intellectual in

nature as they are emotional. The words will carry to action, but only to heighten the emotional tension.

“It will be intense, emotional and gripping, but I wouldn’t necessarily say these are ones that engage the intellect,” Golux said. “It’s something that hits you through the gut.”



Performers Hadassah Nelson, right, Codi Burk, middle, and Pedro Lizardi “Bay of Nice.”

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Actress Grace McCarthy waves from the arms of Chioke Buckley along with Crysta Parks, left, and Bindu Gadamssetty in a scene from “Can Can,” one of three one-act plays produced by Theatre UAF in the Salisbury Theatre.

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