

## "The Hostage" by Brendan Behan to be performed

**January 23, 1978**

"The Hostage" by Brendan Behan, a music-hall interpretation of the truth with a contemporary message about perceptions of freedom, will be presented at 8 p.m. February 2-5 and 7-12 in the UCSD Theatre at the University of California, San Diego.

The play, described as "outrageous" by its director Arthur Wagner, professor of drama, nonetheless delineates problems which persist to this day within the context of the state of war which exists in Ireland.

"There is a tension," says Wagner, "between the reality of the action and the pure music-hall turns, the jokes and songs and asides. Both are essential to the experience of the play. Our problem is to provide some consistency, creating a world which includes both those elements -- entertainment and a portrait of people's lives -- and which is believable."

The play takes place in a brothel/pub in 1958. The Irish Republican Army in Dublin has kidnapped a cockney soldier whom they plan to hold hostage in exchange for an IRA member in jail in Belfast who has been sentenced to be hanged. The play was originally written in Gaelic and called "An Giall" and was a relatively serious play with only a few characters. It was, according to Wagner, almost a tragedy, based on a true incident. It was only with the English translation that Behan added the touches which characterize the play as performed today.

Among the characters are Pat, the caretaker of the brothel and his almost wife Meg. Pat fought in the 1916 rebellion which he has romanticized in the fashion common to IRA members. There is an aura about 1916 which the contemporary IRA soldiers in the play seem to lack, but that haunts people like Pat who remember.

Monsewer, an Englishman friendly to the Irish cause and who had fought with Pat in 1916, owns the brothel. It was at first a hiding place for underground Irish Republicans who didn't accept the treaty of 1921 with England which divided Ireland into two states. Following the signing of that treaty, the conflict which rages today broke out.

Among Behan's devices to involve the audience in his commentary on the abuses, absurdities and agonies equally divided between the two sides in the conflict, is a surprise twist on the ending of the real-life story which inspired the play.

Wagner explains that the music-hall "bits" in which the characters engage do not interrupt the flow of the play as they might, for example, in a Brechtian play.

"The audience is a part of the lives of the characters on stage," Wagner said. "This is unlike Brecht's plays in which characters step out and become actors. These characters are always themselves except every so often a character breaks into a set-piece. After all, they do live in a brothel -- a pub -- and they are entertainers of a sort."

The play, says Wagner, has not been modernized except that a few confusing words have been Americanized. Edvard Ronning of Norway, a graduate student, serves as the play's dramaturge. He and assistant director Susan Imhoff, a Muir College senior, have done research into topical events which affect the play's action.

Ronning calls himself the "inside-outsider," criticizing or commenting on both the dramatic component of the play and the actors' success in conveying the play's message. Ronning, who fills a role considered essential to dramatic productions in other parts of the world but only recently recognized in the United States, says the special challenge to him in "The Hostage" has to do with the delivery of the music-hall pieces which require excellent timing.

" These are short scenes, jokes and the 'edge' must be very sharp and clear," says Ronning. "It's like listening to music. You must ask yourself constantly, 'does it sound right?'"

The cast includes the following: Pat, Christopher Schulte; Meg, Robyn Hunt; Monsewer, Frank Collison, and Leslie (the British soldier), Lawrence Paulsen. The technical staff, in addition to Susan Imhoff, includes: set designer, Gerald R. Burke; costume designer, Deborah Dryden; lighting designer, Rich Allee; stage manager, David Hyslop, and technical director, David Kreibs.

Tickets for "The Hostage" are \$3.75 for general admission and \$2.50 for UC San Diego students and may be purchased at the UCSD Theatre Ticket Office, 452-4574 or 452-3793. The ticket office is in the theater in Building 203 of the UC San Diego Administrative Complex.

For information contact: Public Information Office, 452-3120 or Department of Drama, 452-3791

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