

***Waiting for Godot***  
*Kenton Theatre, Henley*  
*26 February 2005*

Samuel Beckett's vision of the human condition in *Waiting for Godot* is bleak: "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more." And the play is about boredom: one early review described it as a play in which nothing happens – twice.

So what should we expect? Two hours of depressing tedium?

The genius of the play is that it is consistently funny, albeit in a surreal fashion, occasionally moving, and in one sequence extremely powerful.

I have seen the play several times, including Peter Hall's original production in 1956, and read it countless times more. And I can genuinely say that this production – a non-professional show, though played by four young professionals – is one of the best I've seen.

One of the problems with playing *Godot* is that it is, apart from a few set pieces, essentially 85 pages of one-liners. This is notoriously difficult to control as far as pace is concerned, yet director Ben Lawson, who also plays Didi, breaks up the action with some cleverly contrived comic business, and constantly keeps our interest.

The individual performances are excellent. Ben Lawson and Robin March play Didi and Gogo (Vladimir and Estragon), waiting for the never-arriving Godot who will, they hope, improve their lot. These are simply two tramps in a desolate landscape, yet the actors brilliantly convey the delicate relationship between the two – almost like an old married couple with their irritations with each other, but with an underlying affection and interdependence that always brings them back together again.

Into their solitude come pompous, blustering Pozzo, played with vulnerable assurance by Kingsley Glover, and his apparently dumb slave Lucky, a touchingly broken-down wreck of humanity played several decades above his real age by Michael Simon.

This encounter leads to the powerful sequence I mentioned earlier, in which the normally silent Lucky appears to rail furiously at God, the universe and everything, with a stream of meaningless words and phrases. Set against a disturbing sound effect that echoes Lucky's anger as it crescendoes to a deafening level, it creates terror in the rest of the cast – a terror that is transmitted to the audience.

The final member of the cast is young James Bradford, who plays the Boy, Godot's messenger, with great self-assurance. However, the director also uses him to interrupt the play with a series of self-deprecating placards announcing such things as 'It doesn't get much better, does it?', 'You should have left while you had the chance', 'Only 20 minutes to go,' and so on.

The set – two stools, a bare tree, an alarm clock and a projected handless clock on the back wall – is simple, and excellently conveys the futility and, ultimately, the pointlessness of existence that Beckett wishes to show.

I look forward to seeing more from this talented young company.