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TOP STORY

ON STAGE

On stage: 'Waiting for Lefty' a story that resonates today

MARCIA WEISS For The Pantagraph

Sep 24, 2021

“**W**aiting for Lefty” opened at Illinois State University Thursday evening, kicking off their 2021-22 season. After the audience had been seated and the familiar “Please turn off your phone” speech was heard over the loud speakers, this was added to the usual plea: “By buying a ticket, you agreed to wear a mask while in the building.” And everyone that I observed did wear their mask, and with no complaint.

Hailed as a “revolutionary oracle,” playwright Clifford Odets produced four plays on Broadway during 1935, when the Depression still gripped the nation. Among these four plays was “Waiting for Lefty.”

ISU's 'Waiting for Lefty' highlights labor, human rights

When the play opens, New York taxi drivers are debating whether or not they should go on strike at a union meeting. They fear losing their jobs altogether, and the paltry wages they bring home to their starving families. Overseeing the meeting is Fatt, the anti-strike union boss.

Ben Davis plays Fatt with sleazy command. Costumer Lindsey Van Wyk dresses him in a shimmery turquoise kaftan, isolating him from the rest of the cast, who are all more or less identically clad in loose-fitting ochre outfits with red accent pieces.

During the course of the meeting, a series of vignettes are interspersed. The actors who were previously agitated cab drivers take on the roles of different workers who are suffering the depths of poverty.

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David Proeber

Hayley Brenner passionately plays Edna, the mother who puts her kids down to bed early, “so they don’t know they missed a meal.” She demands that her husband, Joe, go on strike. Joshua Thomas gives a stirring performance as Joe. He is torn: Should he risk what little salary he has by going on strike?

Florence and Sid have been engaged for four years, but fear that after a few years of marriage they may grow to resent each other after the weight of poverty wears them down. Riley Doerner and Jeremy Miller are heartbreaking as two people who deeply love each other, but are crushed by circumstances, and can’t do the normal things in life that make people happy.

Throughout the play actors are on the sidelines, observing, agitating, sometimes cheering, almost like a Greek chorus. Director Sanhawich Meateanuwat has created an contemporary ensemble piece where the events of 86 years ago have resonance today.

IF YOU GO

What: "Waiting for Lefty"

Where: Center for the Performing Arts at Illinois State University

When: Sept. 24, 25 at 7:30 p.m., and Sept. 25, 26 at 2 p.m.

Cost: \$12-\$17

Running time: 1 hour and 50 minutes, with no intermission

69 photos of Bloomington-Normal landmarks under construction

NORMAL CONSTRUCTION



FILE PHOTO: Normal downtown improvement project. 8-8-80 (Pantagraph/CARLOS T. MIRANDA)

CARLOS T. MIRANDA

NORMAL STREET 3