

Ring Theater Has Rough Going With Elusive, Anti-War Harangue

By CANDICE RUSSELL
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The scholarly merits of "Serjeant Musgrave's Dance" aside, John Arden's overwrought anti-war play makes for a less than enjoyable evening of theater.

THEATER REVIEW

It's duller still in script form. In spite of a few noteworthy performances from the student cast, the University of Miami

Ring Theater production is rough going.

Arden has written a harangue, difficult to inspire and harder to stage. Director Robert Lowery set himself a prodigious task in trying to make this realistic drama meaningful.

The place is anywhere, the time shortly after the next war. The barren landscape is peopled by whores and lovers left behind, striking coal miners and bureaucrats powerless to relieve suffering. Enter Serjeant Musgrave and three of his men, deserters from the war, who seek volunteers for their specious cause.

Arden's mournful theme is that men are fated to substitute one form of tyranny for another. To end war with a war of one's choosing is absurd — as absurd as war itself. But that is what Musgrave and his motley threesome attempt in their call for soldier recruits on the side of God.

AT THE LEAST, their Almighty is indifferent to man's follies. One of Musgrave's soldiers moans, "God's gone to sleep, but when he wakes up again . . ." Until that time, men must take responsibility for their actions, for their destruc-

tion. Though they kill in the name of country or religion, they are hard put to justify the guilt which killing produces. This moral burden has driven away Musgrave and his men from the army on a misguided mission.

The author's philosophy is bombastically, confusingly presented. The central conflict remains elusive, as does the ending. Musgrave and the striking miners clash, without resolving their differences. Oddly, one more death does not awaken the serjeant from his wrong-headed plans.

To his credit, Lowery enlivens the static play with an abundance of singing. He has modernized and Americanized the language of this British work, originally presented in 1959. And he elicits a startling degree of dynamism from quite a few cast members.

BUT THINGS are out of kilter here. The sense of imbalance is strongly suggested by urgent acting, just this side of lunacy. Consistently arresting are Linda E. Young, keeper of the bawdy house; Ray Liotta as Sparky (the best he's ever been), and Fred Mason as the rebellious Hurst, the only actor to maintain a British accent.

Also commendable are Lenora May's Annie, the most damaged victim of war; Ray Faiola's hot-air parson, Michael Williams as the meddling Bludgeon and Alfred George as the constable who looks and speaks like an African tribal chief.

Of particular interest is Jeff Copwood's energetic mayor, a jive-talking conciliator. Peter Heuchling struggles valiantly with the part of

Serjeant Musgrave, a mad religious fanatic whose true colors remain inexplicable.

The mood-building lighting, designed by Diane Edwards and David Jacques, and clay rock set of Bill Ward convey a frightening sense of the timeless.

"Serjeant Musgrave's Dance" continues tonight and Sunday, then returns next Wednesday through Saturday. Curtain is at 8. Telephone 234-3355 for reservations.



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