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A Little Clearer, Please

[*Editor's Note: The following article contains comments by the director of *The Birthday Party*.*]

by Jim Cada

Understand that you are dealing with an author who claims that to watch his play, *The Birthday Party* is to watch something like "a weasel under the table." That done, you should be prepared to dip your tootsies into the above mentioned concoction, so kindly written by Harold Pinter.

Eight audiences, prepared or not, came to the unveiling of Pinter last February in UNI's Studio Theatre. The reaction was mixed, as reviews from previous productions of the play had promised. Patrons either loved it or were fascinated by it. Some hated it and grew angry, while others finally stopped trying to give it any meaning and just watched. OK.

Now, this is what they were watching. A rundown seaside resort is *the place*—actually the front room—for all three acts. The place is run by Meg and Petey Boles and they have one lodger, Stanley Webber.



Stanley is a down and out recluse; Meg is scatter brained and dotes on Stanley; Petey is old. Near by lives Lulu—a somewhat provocative, not particularly sharp chickie. The other two characters are Goldberg and McCann, probably Jewish and Irish, in that order, and probably very evil.

None of these people can count mental health as one of their shining qualities. They *are* Pinter people, and they *are* forced into communicating in a given, enclosed area—a room. This fascinates Pinter—bringing people together in defined areas. He sees drama developing by looking at a door. Who will come in? What will they do? A person comes in and meets another already there—what will happen? Their past and future are not involved—those are out there. *The Birthday Party* deals with these characters and what each does, and what happens to each, and that's about it. With those imposed conditions, there isn't much of a beginning, or much of an end; just what you see.

A few words about the actors—they did just fine. It is difficult to go into a play like this with six totally undefined characters in an undefined situation. They had to put meat on each character's bones—right after they found those bones. As for the director, golly, I don't know. You live with this big fat question mark of a script for so long and learn to love it until your thighs sweat and then it's over. Well, that's tough poot.

Anyway, if Pinter sounds like an interestingly cheeky fellow, read or see *The Birthday Party*, or *Old Times*, or *The Caretaker*, etc. You really should because he is. But—don't expect good guys and bad guys or the heaviest of messages or symbols—or for that matter, cymbals.

