

2006

## Stage Center Theatre Newsletter- Nov. 2006

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## Main Stage News

### An invitation to *The Birthday Party*

Director's Notes  
By Dan Wirth

Stanley Webber lives in a run down bed and breakfast in a sea-side town south of London. His hosts are Meg and Petey Boles, a couple in their sixties. Every day is the same. Then two men show up. They seem to have come for him. He appears to know they have come for him and he is filled with fear. He tries to convince them to leave with a combination of charm, reassurances, begging, and threats. He is given a birthday party amidst protestations that it is not his birthday. He becomes increasingly agitated, and during a game of Blind Man's Bluff he tries to strangle Meg. All the lights go out, and when the two men shine a flashlight on him, we see he is attacking Lulu, a young woman attending the party.

The next morning he appears, well-groomed and well-dressed but mute, and is taken away by the two men.

What does it all mean? Who are the men? Why do they want Stanley? What did he do?

In an exchange of letters published in the *London Daily Mail*, November 28, 1967, we see Pinter's attitude toward giving interpretations of his work. The first letter:

"Dear Mr. Pinter,

"I would be obliged if you would kindly explain to me the meaning of your play, *The Birthday Party*. These are the points which I do not understand:

(1) Who are the two men? (2) Where did Stanley come from? (3) Were they all supposed to be normal? You will appreciate that without the answers to my questions I cannot fully understand your play."

Pinter replies:

"Dear Madam,

"I would be obliged if you would kindly explain the meaning of your letter. These are the points which I do not understand:

(1) Who are you? (2) Where do you come from? (3) Are you supposed to be normal? You will appreciate that without the answers to my questions, I cannot fully understand your letter."

Perhaps Pinter is being too flippant, but there does come a point when we stop thinking and want everything handed to us.

(continued on page 2)



Goldberg (Patrick Garone, right) and McCann (Frank Past, left) surround Stanley (Marshall Brown)

### *The Ultimate*

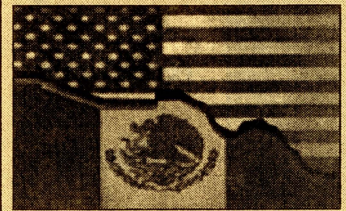
#### *Pendejada*

Studio Series Production

This Week!

November 14 & 16

1:40 & 7:30 p.m.



#### UPCOMING EVENTS:

##### *The Birthday Party*

November 30-December 2,  
7-9, 14-16 @ 7:30 p.m.

##### *Auditions for Spring*

Jan. 16th 1:40-3:00 p.m.  
& 6-9 p.m. Jan. 17th 6-9

##### *The Actor's Nightmare*

February 13 & 15 @ 1:40 &  
7:30 p.m.

##### *Proof*

February 22-24, March 1-3,  
8-10 @ 7:30 p.m.

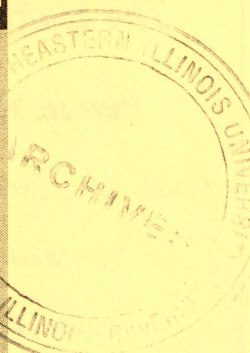
##### *Fitting Rooms*

April 10 & 12 @ 1:40 &  
7:30 p.m.

##### *The Mineola Twins*

April 19-21, 26-28, May 3-5  
@ 7:30 p.m.





**Call the stage**

**center box**

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**773.442.4274**

**Tickets are**

**free for all**

**NEIU faculty,**

**staff, and**

**students**

## Pinter: A reason to give pause.....

An inspiration for the genre that would come to be known as Theatre of The Absurd, Harold Pinter leads a life one could call by the same name. Recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005, political pundit and author of 32 plays, including "The Birthday Party" opening at Northeastern Illinois University on November 30 and showing through December 16. This play is also showing in Poland, Sweden and France next month, if you're in the area.

Harold Pinter, also known as David Baron in his earlier years as a struggling actor, was born on October 10, 1930, in a working-class neighborhood on the East end of London, England. At an early age, Pinter exhibited an aptitude for writing prose and poetry, which earned him a place at the prestigious Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. It was there, in 1948, that he began his career as a writer, under the pseudonym Harold Pinta, but acquired his distaste for institutionalized power, and the abuse of that power. Refusing to answer a military draft call, Pinter attempted to obtain legal status as a conscientious objector, only to be denied and fined. Later in his life, he would become renowned for his

anti-war sentiments, eventually culminating in the 2003 publication of his poetry and prose. Pinter's style has been mimicked by David Mamet and Sam Shepard, yet was criticized for being influenced by Samuel Beckett, author of "Waiting for Godot". Despite critical contradictions, he effectively created a style that is distinctively disjointed, meaningful and succinct, only to be described as "Pinteresque" or, laden with "Pinter Moments". "Pinter Moments" are, essentially, long spaces of silence between dialogues or monologues meant to describe the menacingly comedic psychosis of the characters or character involved in the scene. We have all experienced a "Pinter Moment", whether we have been aware of it or not.

Language holds power, and Harold Pinter has said of language, "The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, and anguished or mocking smokescreen which keeps the other in its true place. When true silence falls we are left with echo but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say that

it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness." Absurd, indeed. With such contemporaries as Eugene Ionesco ("Rhinoceros") and Jean Genet ("The Balcony"), Harold Pinter managed to carve out a style that is disarming, engaging and altogether thought provoking. And he does it by saying so little. Contrastingly, whereas his writing is sparse, his political interest and involvement is quite prolific. Pinter has given lectures for several years regarding his controversial opinions on immigration, U.S. policy, England's involvement in world affairs, and his blatant disgust for those in power. Political themes can be seen in much of his writing. In a typical Pinter play, we meet people defending themselves against intrusion or their own impulses by entrenching themselves in a reduced and controlled existence. Another principal theme is the volatility and elusiveness of the past.

Written by Shama Dardai

## Stage Center hosts *The Birthday Party*

(continued from page 1)

We have been grooming our expectations on films and television, where everything is presented in a real world and there is a justifiable cause for all actions. But... does it really matter that we know who the two men are, where Stanley is from, or even the psychological state of the people?

What we are seeing is a theatrical presentation, terrifying, funny, confusing, sad but an event that only exists because we, the company, are presenting it to you, the audience, the only conditions that create

theatre. We are left with a sense of genuine unease, as though indescribable evil really were stalking outside the door of even the most ordinary of homes, awaiting its chance to enter. So to paraphrase Goldberg, "Sit back, relax, take it easy...remember, don't worry; only you know what it all means."

*The Birthday Party* opened on Broadway on my 12<sup>th</sup> birthday. This was 12 years before I met the director of the production, Alan Schneider. He became a mentor and a friend to me until his tragic death

in 1984. It is to him that I dedicate this production. I'd like to think he is still with us, and is a guest at *The Birthday Party*.

### *The Birthday Party*

Cast:

Petey.....Chris Leonard  
 Meg.....Kara Ewinger  
 Stanley.....Marshall Brown  
 Lulu.....Stephanie Wyatt  
 Goldberg.....Patrick Garone  
 McCann.....Frank Past

