

## Harold Pinter

(continued from previous page)

er to controller. For me to be able to shift like that is very exciting."

However, there is more to their

role-playing antics than just satisfying a fetish. Fantasy and reality end up intermingling at what may be an unhealthy level. As the pair tango in more intense head-games, their love looks poised to be a messy battlefield. The play for power in

the marriage is what makes the story a fascinating production for director Jeffrey Bihr.

"It's a complicated, sexy, dangerous, loving, exciting, games-playing relationship that keeps shifting ground," said Bihr, who has taught

at the American Conservatory Theater and acted with the Berkeley Repertory Theater. "I think the dangerous part comes from jealousy, emotional blackmail. It comes from who's winning and who's losing. The stakes are quite high all the way through, though they're playing games with each other.

"I'm approaching it almost as if they're two animals — two mating panthers circling each other," he said. "We don't know if they're going to growl, snap, bite or make love to each other. We don't know who's dominant and who's submissive."

The comparison to volatile creatures isn't too far off. As the two suburbanites get caught up in taking on other personas, their verbal sparring becomes quite physical. Bihr has devoted a great deal of thought to showing the brutality of the pair's interactions.

"There is a lot of choreography in the piece — though hopefully no one can see it," Bihr said. "It's not like a dance. There are some grabs, some hints of physical violence. Even in loving moments, when they're getting close to each other, it's a highly choreographed dance of passion."

Fortunately, for the two leads, rehearsing carnal closeness hasn't felt very awkward. SST Founder Rush Rehm ("Richard"), a professor in the Drama and Classics Department, was in fact previously "married" to Kostopoulos in a Stanford production of "Biedermann and the Firebugs." University colleagues since 1999, they previously worked on three plays together, including "Lysistrata" in 2003. Their rapport has proved nothing but beneficial for staging "The Lover."

"We're doing some very risky physical things, as well, that take a lot of time to work out and it takes a lot of trust between the two partners," Kostopoulos said. "There's the physical things, physical work and the mental dexterity...you're all over the place. You have to weave something very tight for yourself."

Long associated with theater of the absurd, the London-born Pinter's plays require actors and directors to pay careful attention to what's being spoken and unspoken. While his dialogue is often described as sophisticated and poetic, he is equally known for writing in moments of silence. Pregnant pauses often speak volumes of emotion and subtext, leaving interpretation open to the audience.

"He does wonderful, witty, evocative things with simple language," Rehm said. "People used to get on about Pinter being someone hard to read. I'd say that's true only in the regard that he doesn't answer all the questions. Pinter is more elusive and ambiguous. He's clever but uncertain."

In sticking with a "couples' night out" theme, "The Lover" will run directly after a theatrical "appetizer" in the form of "Night," an earlier, more subdued Pinter work. The 10-minute play also focuses on a husband and wife reflecting on the evolution of their relationship. For this production, however, Rehm and Kostopoulos will be a lot more stationary. The story delves into how two people can recall the same

memory differently — something many couples debate at one time or another.

"It was my little brainstorm that they would be interestingly paired and played by the same actors as if they were the same couple," Rehm said. "'Night' is a conversation late in the evening about some memory, a primal event — how did they meet, does one remember specificity of events, what are you remembering? It reminded me of Molly Bloom's soliloquy in [the novel] 'Ulysses' and she's remembering the first time she made love. It starts to merge with other times and other people, it's kind of a funny place where memory starts out specific and ends up being a large embrace."

Besides starring in this play, Rehm is sharing co-directing duties with Ed Iskandar, director of Stanford Shakespeare Society, for two of Pinter's earlier sketches, "The Applicant" and "The Collection." Advanced acting students from the Drama Department make up the casts for the double bill, which will be staged in the Prosser Studio.

Pinter, who will turn 75 in October, still stays on top of topical issues. If anything, the left-leaning dramatist is even more vocal now through his art and interviews. Diagnosed three years ago with cancer of the esophagus, he continues to speak out against human rights abuses and the war in Iraq. Meanwhile, his fingerprints are on new projects, including rewrites of a film script attached to Jude Law and Michael Caine.

Although it wasn't until the 1970s that his work carried more political commentary, Pinter has always dealt with themes of oppression and powerlessness. The reason he endures, Bihr said, is his uncanny ability to make a quirky scenario that he wrote decades ago ring truthful today.

"You can stand back and look at this wacky couple — a seemingly very normal, strait-laced English couple — playing games inside their home," Bihr said. "You can stand back and look through a lens and see these people as silly, weird or wonderful, and you can recognize certain patterns in your own relationship." ■

"The Lover," will open July 14 at 8 p.m. at Stanford's Pigott Theater. Presented by Stanford Summer Theater, the production will run through Aug. 7. Show times are Thursdays through Saturdays at 8 p.m.; Sundays at 7 p.m.; 2 p.m. matinee on Aug. 6. Tickets are \$15/\$12 students and seniors. For tickets call (650) 725-ARTS or visit [www.stanford.edu/group/summertheater](http://www.stanford.edu/group/summertheater).

Stanford Continuing Studies will host a community symposium with readings and short performances of Harold Pinter's work on Wednesday, July 20 from 7 to 9:30 p.m. at the Pigott Theater. Playwright Amy Freed, director Rush Rehm, Stanford Drama Professor Alice Rayner, actor Kay Kostopoulos, director Jeffrey Bihr and director Ed Iskandar will engage in a panel discussion of his

(continued on page 10)



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