**Audience takes a grilling in tense psychological drama**

**RAT IN THE SKULL**

By JULIAN WEIST

A TENSE POLITICAL BATTLE of wills between a suspected IRA terrorist and a police interrogator, "Rat in the Skull" provided a gripping conclusion to the Boston Shakespeare Company's festival of Northern Irish theater.

The new play by Ron Hutchinson is ideally suited to the BSC's cramped downtown performance space, being set in the dungeon-like interior of a north London police station. Not only were the bare brick walls enough to suggest the stark interrogation room, but the clever addition of bars to the theater doors placed the audience squarely in the action.

As the accused terrorist sits determinedly through most of the verbal onslaught, it is far to wonder whether it is his character or the audience which is most under fire. The tension continued unabated through the long first act, giving the audience a tangible feeling of apprehension.

The title gives a hint of the double nature of Hutchinson's play. The Skull suggests a cerebral, intelligent piece, and indeed the play is wordy. It required constant attention to pierce the levels of brogue and metaphor and reach the bones of the character interactions. But there is that disquieting image of the Rat. Metaphorically invading the cranium, it gnaws away at the prisoner from inside. While on paper a collection of lengthy speeches, on stage the play hits us at a gut level. Hutchinson must also have been making an Orwellian reference (the play was first performed at the Royal Court in 1984) and his interrogation scene is far more unsettling for being set in contemporary Britain.

Colin Lane gave an outstanding performance as "Demon Bomber" Roche, the accused (and clearly guilty) terrorist. He was involved in his character throughout, red-faced and seemingly on the verge of tears more than once. Lane's easy North of Ireland accent made sense of speeches full of Middle English and goading, while his interrogator's questions became more pressing and goading. Lane struggled to keep himself under control by rhythmically bringing his fist on his knee and his foot on the ground, building visible tension in his body. And when cracks began to appear in his adoptive facade, his reactions were equally convincing.

Asking the questions, and doing most of the talking, was Detective Inspector Nelson, an Irish Protestant member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and an expert in finding "grassers," or informers. Jonathan Epstein—who portrayed several well drawn characters in last month's "Double Cross"—was equally good in a long role which was demanding both intellectually and emotionally.

Nelson is a man equally committed to Ireland, but who has learned his history from different books than Roche. Loyal to both Ireland and the crown, but ultimately not belonging to either, Nelson is a complex character, and Epstein kept him in motion, never resolving him clearly enough for us to settle on one facet of the character as the whole person.

Ted Kazanoff played the police superintendent, outwardly the image of a friendly London bobby, inwardly a quiet, jovial bigot. Kazanoff was odious, but a little overstated. Then again, he was given an overstated character. Superintendent Harris is indistinguishable only in the breadth of his prejudice: against the Irish, blacks, women, and one suspect the French also.

Beyond that, his duties are those of an outsider observing the tense defensive struggle going on in the center of the cell. He is called on to settle the occasional stray comment, which he occasionally does very neatly indeed.

Under his watchful eye, accused and accuser stare each other down. The main event grind on with merciless intensity.

The young police constable on duty is fair to wonder whether it is his character or the audience which is most under fire. The tension continued unabated through the long first act, giving the audience a tangible feeling of apprehension.

By HALVARD K. BIRKELAND

**LOUD AND CLEAR**
By Autograph. On RCA Records.

AUTOGRAPH'S LATEST ALBUM, "Loud and Clear," marks a change from their earlier works. No longer can they be characterized as a typical heavy metal band. Autograph's music is bright, hard and refreshing.

While bearing the stanch characteristic of heavy metal bands such as Iron Maiden, Ratt and KISS, Autograph plays their own brand of hard rock. Their music is not dominated by screaming vocalists or blaring guitars but by controlled power and balance.

They have been influenced by established groups such as Def Leppard and the Scorpions. "Everytime I Dream" is a rock ballad much like the Scorpions'. With very effective vocals layered in the chorus and beautiful riffs between the keyboards and guitars, "She's a Tease" was influenced by Krokus. The opening riff and guitar solo are accented by the melodic change in the center of the piece. "Casino...credit card...broadway play." Afterwards, the sound of Krokus returns.

The greatest change in Autograph's music is the role of the bass and drums. In the past, Randy Rand on bass and Keni Richrath on drums have been relegated to background. Now, they contribute to the music line up in pieces such as "She Never Looked So Good For Me." They are no longer another heavy metal band, but rather a refinement of earlier work.

"When the Sun Goes Down" is the best song on the album. With lyrics reminiscent of "Stare at the Sun" by Jon Butcher Axis, it is the high point the album closes on. As sung by Steve Plunkett.

**When the sun goes down that's when the music starts to play When the sun goes down we can forget about the day When the sun goes down that's when I start to come alive When the sun goes down that's when I shift to overdrive**

As sung by Steve Plunkett.

Public reaction has been favorable. "Loud and Clear" has been rated a smash hit by the music critics.

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