DER MANN IM MOND (MAN IN THE MOON)

Theater Workshop in the MIT Foreign Languages and Literatures Department. September 17-19.

By Courtney Shiley

S
ome of you may remember the signs hanging in the halls a little while ago boldly announcing, "Theater Work- shop! Take part in a theater presentation conducted in German, with Holger Teschke from the Berlin Ensemble!"

Organized by the members of the German section of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures and sponsored by the Goethe Institute, the workshop drew a dozen adventurous students who dared to perform a one-act play in which an everyman named Sebald is introduced to socialism and consequently wants to get his own fair share out of life.

Waiting at a station for his girl to arrive, a train conductor asks the amorous Sebald what he knows about Karl Marx. Getting no satisfactory answer, the conductor equips Sebald with one sentence: "Socialism wants everyone to get his fair share of this world." Sebald, suddenly interested, asks, "It looks like that could possibly happen this very night!"

Although the answer is negative, Sebald tells his girlfriend about his newly-found hope only to lose her to others when she adopts his philosophy and shows him the other side of the coin. She tells him, "I want to give you your fair share, Sebald - 10 minutes and a dance. There are others who deserve shares of me as well." Trying to adapt to this new situation, Sebald then decides that if socialism gives others the right to his girl, it gives him the right to part of all other girls.

But that is not contented to be. "Kiss me, too," he says to a young embracing couple. "Why won't you kiss me, too? I have no girlfriend and I am entitled to my fair share." But the couple responds that "love cannot be shared." Bitter at his loss and disillusioned by the failure of socialism to improve his life, he asks a gravedigger to bury him. The gravedigger is a pragmatic fellow and tells poor Sebald that he only buries corpses. In despair because of yet another injustice, Sebald commands the gravedigger to "get to work!" and shoots himself.

In this workshop, Holger Teschke along with Adrian Linsgava (as Sebald) Ryan J. Kernan '98, Ken J. Lim '95, Beth Chapple, John M. Dykes '96, Neil T. Jenkins '97, Courtney Shiley '98, Bernard K. Khor '98, and Dani Kaugarschut '98 (along with visiting assistant German professor Bettina Brandt and theater arts lecturer Kermit Dunsthberg) addressed two challenges. First, the troupe investigated the social relevance of a mostly-forgotten Expressionist theater piece to the modern world. While the problems inherent to socialism were obvious in 1920, this 1994 performance managed to engage a contemporary audience by using love as a tragicomic example to show that political philosophies can’t right wrongs in all areas.

The second challenge the director faced was working with nonprofessional actors who were not all fluent in German. In tune with the tradition of theater workshops, he approached the play not as a complete performance, but rather a chance for the actors to experience and learn from new ideas.

Perhaps to compensate for the absence of a stage, or to fully engage the actors at all moments, the director created a mobile human wall at the edge of the cemetery, composed of actors not currently involved in a scene. The wall took an active part in the story, sometimes hugging Sebald, sometimes taking a more critical stand toward him and the other characters.

All told, this workshop was a great success. The students had fun rehearsing in a foreign language, and because of the ability of the director, a mostly inexperienced troupe performed a worthwhile premiere of Britting’s Man in the Moon.