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Thursday 16 October 1975

Like 'Hamlet' or Not, You Will Enjoy 'Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead'

By WALTER LAZENBY

Imagine two almost indistinguishable minor characters from a Shakespearean tragedy transplanted into a modern piece and speaking dialogue which is largely contemporary prose, yet moving inevitably toward a doom already established hundreds of years ago.

Imagine them playing games with each other, joking and punning as pastimes, as they "drift down time clutching at straws" in an attempt to understand their situation — and, incidentally, missing the most obvious clues.

Imagine Prince Hamlet and King Claudius, with Gertrude and Ophelia and Polonius, topsy-turvily becoming minor

Through appropriate for "Hamlet" perhaps, the costumes, especially those for the travelling actors, seemed to me too somber for the mood of this comedy.

Giving a contrast which is helpful in distinguishing between two non-entities, Kevin T. Kelly is a somewhat understated Guildenstern, compared to Jim Davis's limberer and more expansive Rosencrantz. At one point, Stephen D. Griffin gives a convincing imitation of the throes of death, almost disproving one character's argument that death cannot be imitated convincingly on the stage.

Wearing an "antic disposition" well, Jeff Eaton makes a presentable and very princely Hamlet, well matched

with Cindi Switzer's credible Ophelia.

Then you can begin to anticipate some of the effects in "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," the

A Review

Homecoming show occupying Eastern's Playroom this weekend.

The author, Tom Stoppard, marked himself as one of the most promising new British playwrights when the play succeeded in the late sixties.

This is the first performance in Charleston of any Stoppard play.

If you like the play "Hamlet" you will especially enjoy Stoppard's echoes and additions: the scene which Shakespeare never wrote showing Hamlet surprising Ophelia in her chamber; the arrival of the troupe of players, with their cynical comments on the actor's profession; the play-within-the-play, which goes farther than Shakespeare's playlet does; and the scenes aboard ship.

If you don't know the original play, you still can enjoy this one, since dramatic irony makes Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's fate clear to the spectator well before it is to them. Hence you can appreciate the irony of the

characters exulting in their freedom and idly quipping that "having a future is something that could go on forever" moments before their catastrophe descends.

The cast, by and large, consists of actors lacking experience on the Eastern stage. Never mind — none of the roles call for subtle characterization. Director Gabbard has supplied what is necessary by concentrating on variety of movement and pace. The tempo of the exchanges between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern shifts nicely, and nimble actors use most spaces available about the pseudo-Elizabethan platform stage. But the pipe scaffolding at the rear cries out to have been worked into the blocking, somehow. (Go to top of col. 2)