

'A Doll's House' offers unique setting, complex character issues

By Ben Turner
VERGE EDITOR

The Theater Department's production of Henrik Ibsen's classic "A Doll's House" opens Wednesday at the Village Theater.

Faculty member Clarence Blanchett is directing the performance, which will enjoy a five-night run, closing with a matinee performance on March 2. This production is a unique experience for Blanchett as he allowed senior theater arts major Patrick Hamm design the setting and props.

Hamm entered Eastern interested in acting, but after roles in productions like "12th Night" and "Summer and Smoke," he realized set design was the aspect of theater he was interested in the most. Although he has five student-directed one-acts and last year's "The Importance of Being Earnest" to his set design credit, Hamm said this is his biggest project to date.

"I've enjoyed doing this project because I've had a chance to work with a big budget. Typically students don't get to design the main-stage shows; it's all faculty designed," Hamm said. "When [Blanchett] told me I could design the show I felt honored because it's a bigger show in that it's a period show."

Many of the elements of designing the set were challenging

because of the time period of the play— it's set in late 19th century Scandinavia. Hamm mentioned the biggest undertaking was a piano he constructed.

"Everytime you do something new, you're faced with a new challenge and problem. Our biggest challenge on this [production] was a piano Miranda Stone and I built that looks authentic," he said.

Hamm said he plans to attend grad school following this semester and that "Hamlet" is a production he has wanted to design because creating a set appealing to a modern audience would be a challenge.

Blanchett cast junior theater and psychology major Jessica Siegel in the lead role of Nora Helmer. The role of Helmer has been one of the most sought after roles in theater during the last century. Siegel's character undergoes a metamorphosis during the three acts. Women's liberation is a significant element of the plot, but Blanchett said he didn't necessarily approach the production simply focusing on women's rights. He focuses on human rights.

"Women of the time weren't allowed to borrow money or do things without their husband's permission," Siegel said. "In the play I save my husband's life by borrowing money, but I forge a name to do it. I get myself in trouble and in the end I stand up to my

husband."

"I think in this society Nora does break away, and in a sense she's a victim— a word we love so much today," Blanchett said. "She's a victim, but so is her husband; they're both part of a tradition in which they grew up."

Blanchett said this type of theater, realism, is his favorite although he has jumped around and experimented with absurdism in the past.

"It's about human beings knowing who they are, I didn't approach [this production] favoring one sex or the other," Blanchett said. "I would never approach this play as if it was some propagandous type of thing. It's not human enough for me."

Seigel and fellow castmate senior theater arts major, Theresa Lipinski, pulls double duty for "A Doll's House." Lipinski called her character, Kristen Linde, the antithesis of Nora. Both women also work in the costume shop assisting senior Kristen Joern, who was in charge of designing the costumes.

Eastern students Tim Travous, Kyle Sanders, Luke Gerdes, Jenni Passig, Natalie and Noelle Parkerson and Nathaniel and Rebeckah Tharp round out the cast.

Hamm, Seigel, Lipinski and Blanchett all agreed the amount of energy the audience brings to



COLIN MCAULIFFE/PHOTO EDITOR

Patrick Hamm, a senior theater arts major, stains a prop piano for the upcoming play "A Doll's House" which opens Feb. 26.

the theater greatly influences the performance.

"It's always a new feeling when the audience takes their seats and that's the best feeling because you know your time hasn't been wasted," Lipinski said.

"The audience will make or break your show, they definitely

carry the performance with the energy they bring," Seigel said.

"A Doll's House" opens Wednesday at The Village Theater (960 18th Street) and runs until March 2. All shows begin at 7 p.m. except the final performance, which is at 2 p.m. For ticket information call 581-3110.