

Overnight



The Dallas Morning News
DallasNews.com

Thursday, October 25, 2001
II Page 35A

Profound 'Six'

SMU stages penetrating, multilayered play within a play

By LAWSON TAITTE
Theater Critic

When you walk into Southern Methodist University's Greer Garson Theatre, four very handsome students are swinging their bodies through actors' exercises while others do backstage odd jobs. Then they rehearse — hilariously — the Pyramus and Thisbe scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

THEATER REVIEW

Suddenly, figures in black appear out of nowhere. They demand that the actors listen to their tragic story. They simply won't leave, they say, until their scenes are re-enacted on the stage.

This, of course, is one of the most famous plays of the 20th century, Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. On Wednesday, SMU opened Robert Brustein's adaptation for the contemporary American stage, further amended by director Mahmood Karimi-Hakak.

Mr. Karimi-Hakak fled Iran this year when the Muslim regime closed his production of the very Shakespeare play involved here. Currently a visiting professor at SMU, he's obviously a director of great gifts. Throughout most of this *Six Characters*, you forget that you're watching students. He uses every trick of stagecraft — and every resource of his fine professional designers — to do what Pirandello's black-swathed figures insist on. He not only brings these characters to life, he invests them with that aura of otherworldliness swirled with the earthiest of passions that constitutes the essence of this masterpiece.

In the playwright's consciousness, every theater is haunted. Mr. Karimi-Hakak and his players let us see and hear the ghosts.

The original text gets wordy at times, and some of that lingers. Theater insiders, especially local ones, will catch more of the self-referential jokes. A couple of the student actors are obviously too young for their roles, though their bodies and costumes convey what their less mature voices cannot.

Quibbles aside, Mr. Karimi-Hakak makes us buy into the play's reputation as one of the most innovative and influential ever written — and not just intellectually, but emotionally. He brings off one stunning theatrical coup after another.

Hey, folks, critics aren't supposed to break the third wall and

address the audience. But Pirandello breaks all the rules, and so will I. I wept for terror and joy all through the final half hour of this production. I wept walking

back to the car. I wept all the way home.

Six Characters in Search of an Author, presented by Southern Methodist

University at Greer Garson Theatre in the Meadows School of the Arts, Hillcrest Avenue at Binkley, through Sunday. Tickets \$6 to \$12. Call 214-768-2787.