

## L'ECO DELLA STAMPA

(L'Argo della Stampa: 1912 - L'Informatore della Stampa: 1947)

UFFICIO DI RITAGLI DA GIORNALI E RIVISTE  
FONDATA NEL 1901 - C.C.I. MILANO N. 77394Direttore: UMBERTO FRUGIUELE  
Condirettore: IGNAZIO FRUGIUELE

VIA GIUSEPPE COMPAGNONI, 28

MILANO

Telefono 723.333

Corrispondenza: Casella Post. 3549 - Teleg.: Ecostampa  
Conto Corrente Postale 3/2674

LEGGASI A TERGO

THE DAILY AMERICAN-ROME

24 MAG. 1964

## THEATER

Bérenger, the hero of Eugène Ionesco's new play "Le Roi Se Meurt" at the Quirino Theater, is already a familiar figure to followers of the Theater of the Absurd. Ionesco has used him as the protagonist of both "Tueur Sans Gages" and "Rhinocéros" and so we would expect to find him as the ordinary little man or Everyman that he was in those earlier plays.

Instead Bérenger here is King Bérenger I, absolute ruler as we suppose of a kingdom of some nine million people. He has not one but two queens and powers that even permit him to tell clouds to stop dropping rain.

But it is only facade or rather Ionesco's absurdity; Bérenger is very much the same as he always was, a rather helpless if likeable representative of common humanity. And as in "Tueur Sans Gages" he is once again facing death.

In this play, however, Ionesco takes up where he left off at the end of "The Killer." The first thing that Bérenger learns at the beginning of the play is that he will die

at the end of it. On the basic level of "meaning" it is the playwright trying to communicate what it feels like to die in spite of all desire to live. It is not a story or a development but an intensification of what Ionesco has called "a series of states of consciousness."

Bérenger is a failure when the play begins. His kingdom has dwindled away to a few thousand useless beings. There is nothing to build on; the schools retain only the mentally retarded and Mongolian idiots. He no longer has power to command, even his own body fails him.

There is a slight clash at first between the two queens, one the embodiment of cold reason, the other of creative love. But they are really only two visible aspects of the same woman and there is no doubt who will win. The astrologer-doctor-executioner of the court knows this and sides with strength. Bérenger is going to die, no amount of love can save him.

But as the guard begins to recount the achievements of his reign, our view of Bérenger changes. He invented nearly everything we find, including the airplane (the guard was his mechanic). But he also was the one who succeeded in splitting the atom.

More than just Everyman, Bérenger is also humanity itself whose doom is foretold by cold logic in spite of the goodness of love. And even more in a sense (for the guard also announces that he invented the trees and the forests) he is in a way God dying under the onslaught of too mechanical logic without love. There is no longer any valid reason for living as the symbolic collapse of his kingdom shows.

It is absurd that he is dying suddenly like this but it is just as absurd that he should go on living. There is no argument against the futility of life in the face of inevitable death and here Bérenger relents far easier that he did in "Tueur Sans Gages."

There are wonderfully funny "absurd" lines in the hour and one half it takes Bérenger to die but this is still Ionesco's most straightforward drama to date. The conclusion is announced at the beginning, death, and though Bérenger and the audience laugh at the baldness of it, there is no mistake. Step by grim step, the king sinks into senility losing his crown, scepter and sight on the way.

If the statement seems pessimistic in the stating, it is not so on the stage. Anguish, tragedy, hopelessness mingle with the comic con-

dition of man's existence and Ionesco's humorous fantasy to create a humane despair. Ionesco once wrote that "nothing makes me more pessimistic than the obligation not to be pessimistic. I feel that every message of despair is the statement of a situation from which everybody must freely try to find a way out." In the play he doesn't say what it is or even if it is possible but he is opening the eyes of the spectators (to whom Bérenger makes a direct appeal) so that perhaps at least one might be found.

The Teatro Stabile of Turin has staged the play marvelously well; indeed it seemed like a different company than the one which melodramatized "Les Main Sales" last week.

Giulio Bosetti as King Bérenger showed himself an actor of considerable depth, visibly aging on the stage as the power of dying took hold of him. Vain, thoughtless, egocentric as Bérenger must be (being human), Bosetti still succeeded in making him likeable in his resemblance to the ordinary person.

Marina Bonfigli as Queen Margaret (logic) and Paola Quattrini as Queen Mary (love) were natural counterparts in physical appearance (interesting to know that love is blonde, reason brunette) and nicely

differentiated in their opposite soft-hard approaches to Bérenger.

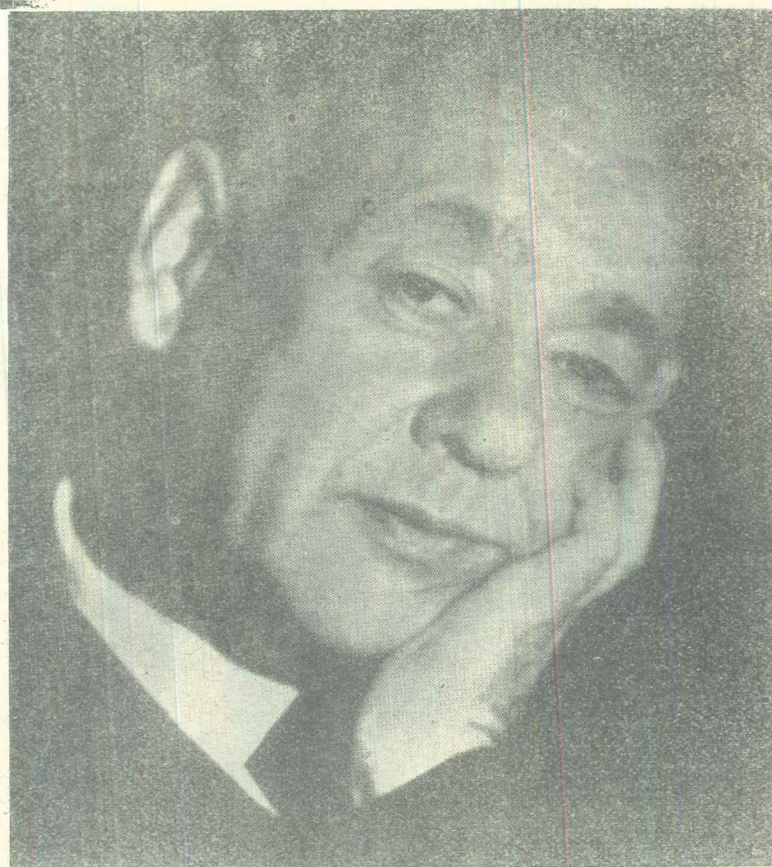
Franco Passato as the white-faced executioner-doctor, Alvisé Battain as the soldier-guard and Silvana De Santis as the nurse and maid were consistently good in their small parts and Miss De Sanctis pumped a lot of her own vivacity into what could have been a drab role.

Jose Quaglio, the Venice-born director who does most of his work in Paris, did an excellent job of maintaining the necessary fine line between fantasy and reality in an Ionesco play and in restraining the commonest failing of the Italian actor—overstatement. His direction showed an appreciation of Ionesco's dialogue yet he kept the pace fast.

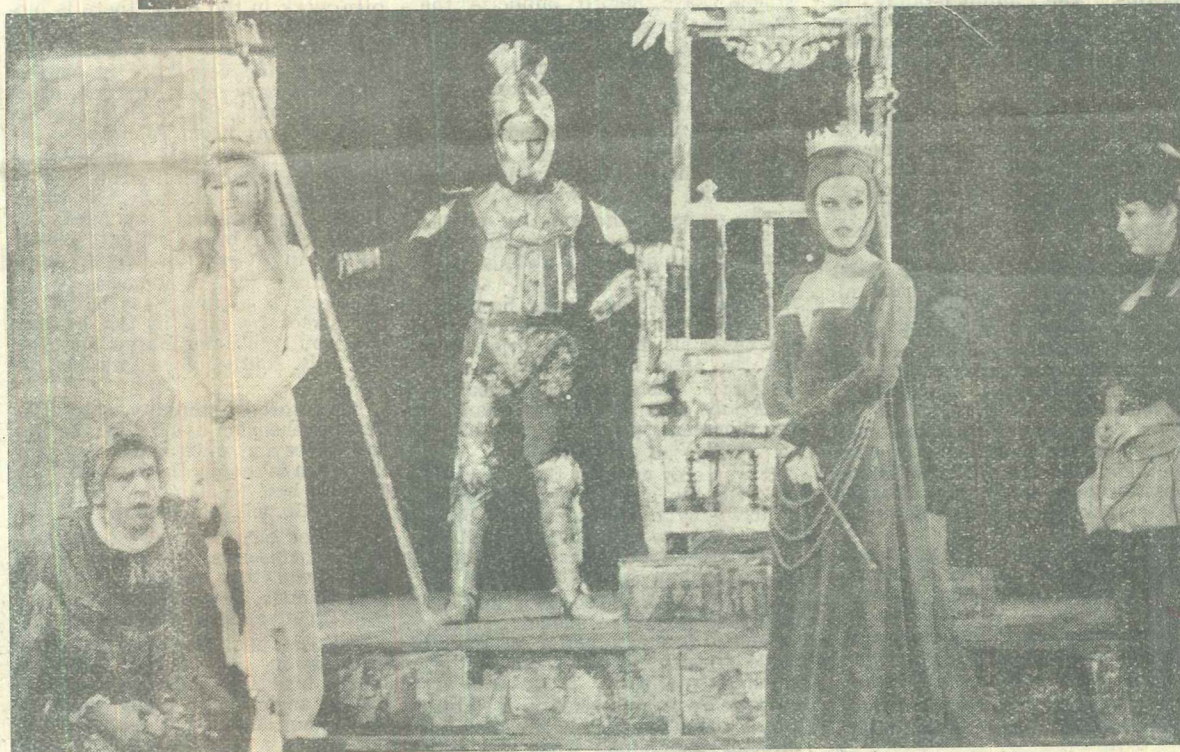
Finally a special word for set and costume designer Emanuele Luzzatti whose ideas really succeeded in enhancing the meaning of the play. By using four revolving fluorescent doors instead of the usual alternative, he not only sped up the play and gave extra beauty to the stage but allowed the remarkably effective blackout scenes at the end to have their full power.

The translation was by Gian Renzo Marteo, the music by Giancarlo Chiaramello and Alessandro Pinelli was assistant director.

—KEN WLASCHIN



EUGENE IONESCO



THE KING LEARNS HE MUST DIE — King Bérenger I, protagonist of Eugène Ionesco's new play "Le Roi Se Meurt," turns into a pathetic figure as he learns he will die in one hour and a half and none of his court can help him. Appearing in the production by the Teatro Stabile of Turin at the Quirino Theater in Rome are (from left) Giulio Bosetti as the doomed king, Paola Quattrini as Queen Mary, Alvisé Battain as the soldier, Marina Bonfigli as Queen Margaret and Silvana De Santis as the servant Juliette. José Quaglio directed and Emanuele Luzzatti designed the set and costumes