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By MEL GUSSOW

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Brenzell Directs Tale of Family Murders

By MEL GUSSOW

So far as it is known, Antonin Artaud wrote only one actual play, "The Cenci," based on a play by Shelley and a translation by Stendhal, both filtered through Artaud's demonic imagination.

"The Cenci" was first staged in Paris in 1935, directed by Artaud and starring him in the lead role of Count Cenci, the 16th-century arch-villain who murdered his sons and raped his daughter. The play is currently being given a rare American production at Cafe La Mama.

Before the premiere, Artaud wrote: "The gestures and movements in this production are just as important as the dialogue." In his stage directions he is exact and graphic about how he wants the work presented.

Characters are "panic-stricken," teeth are "clenched," and "the whole crowd, as if it had received

The Cast

THE CENCI, a play by Antonin Artaud, translated by Simon Watson Taylor. Directed by Martin Brenzell; music by David Walker, lighting by Roxanne Kadishov, costumes by C. J.; stage manager, Karen de Francis. Presented by La Mama E. T. C. at La Mama, 74A East 4th Street.

Orsino	Jacques Brouwers
Beatrice	Tanya Howard
Cenci	Andreas Katsulas
Giacomo/Bernardo	Robert Larsen
Lucrecia	Marilyn Roberts
Camillo	Charles Stanley

a powerful punch in the stomach, draws in its breath, and exhales it in a great cry."

The play is full of "sepulchral" bells, "fearful" storms, "violent" orgies, even "fierce" lights. Just reading the stage directions is enough to give one shudders, and the play itself throbs with cruelty and monstrosity.

Upon this fiendish vision, Martin Brenzell, the director, has imposed his own interpretation. First he banishes the dark corridors, winding galleries and grinding wheels

of a prison rack, and sets the play on a bare floor. The lighting is mostly murky, never fierce. The production as a whole lacks ferocity.

The actors are dressed, similarly, in tatters, and perform mostly at a crouch, leaping like monkeys. While delivering dialogue, they do headstands, push-ups and somersaults—which is not precisely what Artaud meant by "gestures."

There is a uniformity within this monkey cage that makes it, for one thing, difficult to distinguish the characters. Besides Cenci, only his daughter Beatrice stands out, and she because of her saucy Italian accent, startling in an otherwise clear-spoken Anglo-Saxon company.

Brenzell has cut the text and reduced the number of characters, all of which indicates that he is not as interested in the play as in evok-

Andreas Katsulas Cast in Title Role of Count

ing atmosphere. Occasionally he conjures up images that are compelling but the net effect is less pestilential than he probably envisioned.

This is the second Artaud evening in recent weeks at La Mama, which may signify a trend: directors attempting to theatricalize the work of this essential theoretician. The first was "Black Sun," an anthology, a kind of "Artaud on Artaud," conceived and directed by Robert Cordier. The excerpts from letters and essays were interesting (although overdramatized) and as in "Cenci" a few of the images were striking, if not definably Artaudian. It is unfortunate that Artaud is not alive to speak out on misconceptions about his method.