

STAGE WEEK

THE INTERROGATOR-PRISONER ROLES

By LAWRENCE CHRISTON

There's been strong speculation that one of the reasons the U.S. government was anxious to get Nicholas Daniloff out of the hands of Soviet authorities is that there were signs he was beginning to fall prey to what is known in psychological literature as the Stockholm syndrome. This syndrome refers to a case in Sweden where bank employees held hostage by robbers began to sympathize and identify with their captors' plight.

Ellen McLaughlin's "Days and Nights Within," opening Saturday at the Back Alley, deals in essence with the same phenomenon in asking the question, "What is the self, that someone can either hold on to it or lose it?"

"Days and Nights Within" was winner of the Great American Play Festival at Louisville's Humana fest in 1985 and has since gone on to productions in Chicago, Toronto and Yugoslavia.

"When I was 13, I read a book by Erica Wallach called 'Light at Midnight,' which dealt with her being held and interrogated in East Berlin in 1950," McLaughlin said. "The play, which is set in the same place and time as Wallach's book, is an attempt to find out why the book was so evocative to someone like me, who grew up sheltered in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. It deals with an interrogator and his prisoner who see each other every night for two years, and how they begin to affect each other. It's not a political play, not a Commie-baiting vehicle. For me it's about how the soul can triumph under terrible adversity when it's stripped down to nothing."

Actor-director Claude Beauclair, whose 15-year-old acting troupe regularly sorties from Paris to the United States (they brought "Spectaculaire Baudelaire" to the U.S. last year), is back this season with Moliere's "Le Misanthrope," which will be performed in French ("12 feet to the line," said Beauclair, with pedagogical assurance) and will make use of authentic wigs and costumes and Handel's Concert Grosso No. 6 to beef up Beauclair's company of five. "Le Misanthrope" plays Cal State Fullerton on Friday and Caltech in Pasadena Saturday. The tour's first performance took place recently at Versailles in a bang-up start the old master would have savored.

You never know what to expect from someone who could write a musical called "How Much Can a Grecian Urn?" That's what Jack Grapes contributed to Tulane University during his student days there, before he became a poet, an actor and a teacher. He was last seen here in Milton Katselas' production of "Romeo and Juliet." It

was in Katselas' acting class that he met collaborator Bill Cakmis, with whom Grapes concocted a fanciful piece on what William Shakespeare was like before he penned his first hit, before he was somebody.

"Circle of Will" is the result, which Cakmis and Grapes bring to the Zephyr Theater starting today for a run of Sunday brunches.

"It's an extended one-act piece tied in with a Renaissance Faire, complete with juggling, magic and a unicyclist," Grapes said. "The idea is that by the time the play opens, you already feel yourself

alive in Shakespeare's time. Bill plays Richard Burbage to my Shakespeare. The play is a parody on what Shakespeare must have been like before he became a great dramatist. Burbage, who acted in Shakespeare's plays, doesn't like anything the Bard is doing. "Too much poetry in here," he complains, and "Can't we have something better than 'Should I exist or not exist?' How about 'To be or not to be?'" It's an Odd Couple relationship."

Other openings for the week include Craig Childress' "Animal

Games," a play on adult fantasy which won the American College Theatre Assn. Christina Crawford Playwriting Award. (Crawford is a veteran actress and author of the best-selling and controversial "Mommie Dearest.") Crawford did more than administer the award; she's producing this expanded version of the original in its premiere at the Marilyn Monroe Theater on Thursday.

Thursday is Eugene O'Neill's 98th birthday. Mayor Bradley has proclaimed it Eugene O'Neill Day. To celebrate, an O'Neill Theatre Festival gets under way Thursday at Melrose Theatre with "A Touch

of the Poet." "Before Breakfast" and "Hughie" open Oct. 30, and will run with "Poet" in a repertory schedule. O'Neill's work is also the subject of an original compendium by John Ferzacca, which plays Orange Coast College Thursday through Saturday.

A pre-Halloween spirit should be generated by San Diego Repertory's production of "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," when Ladislav Vychodil unveils his set Wednesday. Vychodil, artistic director of Czechoslovakia's Slovak National Theatre, is an internationally prominent designer and this, his first U.S. work. □

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