

BY JACK STURDY

Darkness At Noon is a timely and ironic season opener for Miami's Ruth Foreman Theatre. Set in 1937 in a repressive Soviet Union that tortured "enemies of the state" for "confessions" of wrongdoing against Stalinism, the combustible drama could well be juxtaposed against the crumbling Iron Curtain of the present day. It is the repression of Stalinism which has prompted quiet revolutions in the Eastern bloc. The Soviet Union opening up elections, the pro-democracy Polish government and the current mass exodus of East Germans to the West are the crops sewn by cruel and overzealous communist regimes that understood neither the human soul nor the capacity for vengeful retribution.

This production is not without flaws. The first act is excruciatingly long and needs to be tightened to complement the incendiary conclusion, and a casting miscue drains poignancy from the few romantic scenes. However, director Joseph Adler ignites the stage with an infusion of tension and pathos.

Roger Pretto, star of the recent film *The Victims*, is Rubashov, one of the Old Guard, a founder of the revolution, and now an old man who is horrified by the path that his purist Bolshevik cause has taken. Any party member who dares to question Stalin's heinous methods is tortured and murdered. Rubashov, once a powerful Politburo leader, is thrown in jail without reason on a trumped-up treason charge.

Communicating through code with the other prisoners, in particular with 402 (Herb Goldstein), Rubashov learns that many of the revo-

THEATRE *Reviews*



**MICHAEL-GEORGE OWENS,
JOHN FIONTE
AND ROGER PRETTO
STAR IN THE RUTH FOREMAN
THEATRE PRODUCTION OF
"DARKNESS AT NOON."**

lution's founders have already been executed. He is confronted by former friend and current

commandant of the prison, Ivanoff (Michael George Owens), who pleads for a confession

that would cost Rubashov little except his dignity. The prisoner refuses and Ivanoff's sadistic junior officer Gletkin (John Fionte) gleefully offers to torture a confession from the old man.

At this point, the play slips into a series of flashbacks that tell Rubashov's story. Ivanoff is thrown from power and Gletkin delivers his vicious promise.

Pretto is a study in control. His performance rises in crescendos of anger and disgust. He manipulates the dialogue with a natural ease. Owens is equally good as Ivanoff. His second act confrontation with Pretto is sensational. Goldstein chews most of the set's scant scenery, playing the Czarist prisoner as a Jewish trash man. Odd choice of dialect and temperament. Fionte, who is normally a master of nuance, gives an off-the-wall screaming performance that must be attributed to Adler's direction. The sadist would have been much more menacing had he been more subtle and controlled. Seth Steiger, cast as another prison inmate, finally gives us a glimpse of his raw talent which was so sadly lacking in *Doubles*.

But do not let these minor problems that will correct themselves during the play's run deter you from enjoying *Darkness At Noon*. It's strong stuff! And you wouldn't want to miss Pretto and Owens in Carbonell-worthy performances.