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## Kent-Trumbull concentrates on Czech play

TICKET

By ANDY GRAY

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Tribune Chronicle

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CHAMPION — *“The Increased Difficulty of Concentration”* is a door-slamming farce with a twist.



Nearly every time one of those doors slams, the scene changes. Sometimes it springs forward several hours; other times it jumps backwards to the beginning of the day. The jumbled time frame is a metaphor for its central character, Eduard Hummel (Peter Byrne), a doctor of philosophy wrestling with questions about happiness and human nature, juggling a wife and a mistress and preparing for an inquisition from a temperamental machine known as PAZUK.

Written by Czech playwright turned Czech President Vaclav Havel, *“Concentration”* won’t be everyone’s cup of tea. The juxtaposition of philosophy and farce can be jarring at times, and the play feels very much a product of the time period when (late 1960s) and the place where (a Czechoslovakia struggling to get out from under oppressive Soviet rule) it was written.

However, one thing that’s undeniable is the quality of the Kent-Trumbull production. Director Eric Kildow is a student of Havel’s work, and his understanding of the play is evident in every aspect of its staging. There are plenty of laughs, but this isn’t a case where actors simply are delivering the one-liners in the script. Here the humor often lies in the pauses between the words — it’s how they’re delivered and the context they’re delivered in that makes them funny.

In Kildow’s staging, Sierra Boyle’s perfect delivery of the line, *“Got it,”* is as funny as any *“joke.”* The

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awkwardness of Eduard's conversations with the two clinicians trying to administer the test from PAZUK also elicits laughter along with the parallels in the conversations between Eduard and his wife (Christine Fowler) and Eduard and his mistress (Adrienne Mackey).

The play features a bravura performance by Byrne, who is on stage essentially the entire play and delivers reams of dialogue with ease while playing a man with a great mind whose behavior seems driven more by other parts of his anatomy.

Fowler and Mackey create interesting contrasts playing characters who are at once opposites and also share plenty in common. Boyle is a scene stealer as Eduard's secretary, whether she's rolling her eyes at his pontifications or fending off his advances. The clinicians with PAZUK (Mariah Armstrong, Charles Smith, Nick Shearer) and Nick Narkum as the voice of the machine each have their moments, and, Jordan Montgomery is an appropriately menacing presence as the Politburo boss overseeing the administration of the test.

Tony Kovacic's set design, which get four doors and two levels into a limited amount of space, is a model of efficiency and serve the play well. Credit also should go to costume designer Eileen Janis Larson and the dressers back stage, who help with the speedy transitions in the time-shifting script and keep the action moving swiftly.

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