



## THE FIREBUGS

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### SUPERB SCORCHER

*A polished, provocative drama production is a five-alarm hit*

GOTTLIEB BIEDERMANN is a really fine fellow, a right guy, an upstanding citizen, solid middle class, a good businessman, a devoted husband. He's so gracious, in fact, that he provides a room in his house for two arsonists who are in the process of destroying his city. When he and his wife discover that their house guests are responsible for the terror, they do nothing, causing an ever present chorus of firemen (*above*) to lament:

Blind, ah, blind is the weakling!  
Trembling, expectant of evil,  
Yet hoping somehow to avoid it!  
Defenseless!  
Ah, weary of menacing evil,  
With open arms he receives it!  
Woe!

In the end Gottlieb and his spouse become accomplices in their own destruction, inevitable because of their failure to oppose it. Man's unwillingness to face reality ultimately will lead to his destruction, says Swiss playwright Max Frisch in his satirical, allegorical comedy, *The Firebugs*, presented in February by the School of Drama.

Frisch's attack on complacency and cowardice is a highly combustible example of modern drama and when ignited by a good production, its message can sear an audience, or at least scorch it a bit, and yet not detract from an entertaining play. The OU version successfully seared, scorched and entertained the audiences who saw its three Holmberg Hall performances. It also impressed the reviewers, who rushed to their typewriters and unanimously anointed it with praise. It was capable, said one, "of setting a new standard for university theatre. . . This production in many respects falls into the category of the professional." Another called it "a complete theatrical experience." A good portion of the compliments was directed, appropriately, to the director, Sandra Lain. Miss Lain is a graduate student and although graduate students direct major OU productions about as often as Doris Day plays Lady MacBeth, the faculty named her director.

Under Miss Lain's expert direction the acting sparkled and the pace never lagged. Some accomplished technical

effects, like the climactic end-of-the-world scene in which the city is finally and totally destroyed by fire, contributed to the overall impact of the production. The epilogue, written some time after the play's debut and not always included, gave the audiences a view of the modern theatre of the absurd. The action takes place in Hell, inhabited by dragons, demons, some commonplace sinners and commanded by Satan and Beelzebub, who, by the way, turn out to be the Biedermanns' former house guests. The play ends with Hell on strike because all of the important sinners are in Heaven, the furnaces extinguished and Satan wheeling into the audience on a bicycle. The plot probably had its origins, write Haskell Block and Robert Shedd in *Masters of the Modern Drama*, in observations in Frisch's diary, inspired by events in Czechoslovakia in 1948. "In a larger sense," they continue, "the stupidity of Biedermann points to cowardice and moral flabbiness in all of us. Biedermann, we are reminded moments before the catastrophe, is Everyman."



Gottlieb Biedermann (*second from right*) was played by Norman Abrams, Mrs. Biedermann (*center*) by Glenda Highland. The arsonists were portrayed by Nelson Spencer (*right*) as the brawny, crass Sepp Schmitz and Steve Coleman (*second from left*) as the suave, fiendish Willi Eisenring. In a supporting role Mary Ed Peters (*left*) played Anna, the Biedermann's harried maid

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A Ph.D. (*Phil Rope*) visits the room where Willi and Sepp sleep—and store their cans of gasoline. Willi (*above*) berates the professor for his idealism. The professor observes the arsonists' activities but refuses to speak out against them until the city is almost destroyed and the flames are licking at his gown.



The set, designed by Raymond Larson, assistant professor of drama, was on two levels—the Biedermann living room below and the attic room above.

The director, Sandra Lain, won several awards for her acting while an undergraduate. Her directing skill promises to equal her talent as an actress.



In the epilogue Sepp-Beelzebub enters from the furnaces of Hell after a fiery end of the world. Special effects, under Profs. Suggs and Mortenson, were dazzling.

