

# Tempo

## 'Diaries': Chilling record of present madness

By Richard Christiansen

Critic at large

**D**IARIES OF A Madman," as conceived by director Steven Rumbelow, presents us with not one, not two, not three, but four Adolf Hitlers, all caged together in hell and covering before a baseball bat-wielding thug-god.

As the audience is herded into the Practical Theater Company's small John Lennon Auditorium, one of these pathetic little Adolfs [Earl Pastko] behind the wooden bars is feverishly writing in his diary, while the other three Hitlers shout, lounge or hop about like the rodents who occupy the small rear cage within this stage cage.

As the audience settles down, the feverish Adolf, in torment and unable to sleep, stuffs his mouth with pills and after nearly choking on them, falls into a deep sleep that produces a nightmarish fantasy on the theme of 20th-Century madness.

Hitler himself is the central character in this surrealistic vision; and if the "Diaries of a Madman" has any connecting plot at all, it is that of Adolf reincarnated, trying vainly to make an impression in the crazy world of 1983.

Scavenging bits of everything from Bertolt Brecht ["The Resistible Rise

### "Diaries of a Madman"

A production forged by Steven Rumbelow and the Practical Theater Company from many sources and directed by Rumbelow, with a set and lights by Tom Larson. Opened July 14 in the Practical Theater Company's John Lennon Auditorium, 703 Howard St., Evanston, and plays at 8 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday, through Aug. 21. Length of performance, 1:35. Tickets are \$6 and \$7. Phone 328-4151.

#### THE CAST

Adolf Hitler .....	William Dick
Adolf Hitler .....	John Goodrich
Adolf Hitler .....	Herb Metzler
Adolf Hitler .....	Earl Pastko
Grimy Biker Slug God .....	Jerry Getz

of Arturo Ui"] to Mel Brooks ["The Producers"], Rumbelow and the actors conjure up a small-time vaude-villian Hitler, making the rounds of song-and-dance halls, talk shows and personal appearances in his futile efforts to come back to his former glory amid the insanities and inanities of our own contemporary world.

WILLIAM DICK, who takes on the burden of the Hitler portrayal, is a stunning, sweaty force of intensity in this dark comedy. His jaw drops in disbelief as he hears the doubletalk in Teddy Kennedy's explanation of Chappaquiddick, his small body twitches with frustration as he attempts to defend his record as a murderer of Jews to the leader of the U.S. Nazi Party in a mock "Klanbake" interview show, and his

face sags with disappointment as his tirades lay an egg before jaded audiences to whom he is old hat.

Mixed in with this show business inferno are other, equally bleak bits of bizarre humor. There are infant-devouring monsters, sick jokes from the death camps, Jew-baiting gags and miscellaneous grossness, along with some not-bad imitations of Clark Gable, Ronald Reagan and Jack Nicholson.

Rumbelow tempts fate when he calls his bombardment of theatrical images a "nickel-and-dime 'Marat/Sade,'" but he [narrowly] escapes that comparison by the force of his own wit and inventiveness.

For those who have seen Rumbelow's past work in Chicago, and his "Bridal Polonaise" at the Black Bird Theater, the experimental techniques of "Diaries of a Madman" may seem perhaps a bit predictable. The flamboyant theatricality, the deeply ironic show business metaphors and the blood-chilling final images are all familiar from his past work.

Still, in "Diaries of a Madman," when the four Adolfs' rousing grand finale chorus of "That's Entertainment" gradually drifts into deep, silent, frightening darkness, the old blood still does chill with the terror of it all.