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By Richard Christiansen

Critic at large

SCRATCH AN experimentalist, and you'll find a true classicist.

Such would seem to be the case with Steven Rumbelow, the English avant-garde theater director who has formed an artistic alliance in Chicago with the Remains Theater ensemble.

Last summer, for the local debut of his Triple Action Theater, Rumbelow staged his Impressionistic version of James Joyce's "Ulysses." For an Oct. 6 opening next fall, he and Remains are planning a new adaptation of Herman Melville's "Moby Dick." And through July 25 in the Theater Building, Rumbelow is presenting two of his own plays, Carole Pluckrose and Michael Wilcox, in a one-hour production of "Faustus" based mostly on the classic 17th-Century verse drama by Christopher Marlowe, with additional words from the epic poetry of Goethe and Lord Byron.

Partly inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre's "No Exit," Rumbelow has set his production in a dimly lighted hell. Here, according to a program note, Faustus and Mephistophilis [pronounced "Me-Faust-ophills"] are seen as "two opposites, trapped and as inseparable as the two halves of the brain, living forever through their own personal hells and representing hell to each other."

IN ONE HOUR, the two beings re-create Faustus' odyssey of ambition and damnation, using imaginative stagecraft to condense the adventures of his globe-girdling travels and his raucous encounter with the Church hierarchy.

Performed on a bare, black platform, with the bare-foot Pluckrose [Mephistophilis] and Wilcox [Faustus] dressed in black and the lighting provided by globe bulbs that are strung and swung for dramatic effect, the production has the trappings of avant-garde sensation.

Warning: Do not sit in the theater's first row; you're likely to become spattered when Pluckrose pours out a bucket of stage blood for Faust's pact with the devil.]

The use of a ticking clock and an hourglass give the

"Faustus"

A new version of the Faustus legend, adapted from Christopher Marlowe's play and directed by Steven Rumbelow. A production of the Triple Action Theater of England presented by Remains Theater in the Theater Building, 1225 W. Belmont Ave. Opened there July 7 and plays at 8 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday, through July 25. Length of performance, 1 hour, 10 minutes. Tickets are \$7 to \$9, with discounts for students, senior citizens and groups. Phone 327-5282.

THE CAST

Faustus Michael Wilcox
Mephistophilis Carole Pluckrose

scene a sense of urgency, but the strength of the production does not lie in such imagery. Rather, it lies in the stripping down of the text to the essential dramatic pairing of damned human and fallen angel, paying for their sins of ambition against heaven.

Pluckrose, pale and intense, and Wilcox, gaunt and haunted, are excellent speakers, able to make Marlowe's poetry sing clearly and meaningfully.

The beauty of their work in this experimental production is that it gives fresh impact to a classic. That, in the end, is the real triumph of the avant-garde.