

MODERN MORALITY PLAY


David Hare's *The Secret Rapture* had the sort of opening in New York a year ago that would discourage any director from introducing the play in Chicago. *New York Times* critic Frank Rich, who praised the play when it opened in London, attacked the Broadway production, and his lead was followed by other local reviewers. Hare, who directed the New York premiere, was shocked to see how quickly critical press can kill an American production.

"The press does have a significant influence on the success of a theatrical production," concedes director Eric Simonson. "It's just the way it is. I don't feel any trepidation about directing *The Secret Rapture* in Chicago, because I like it a lot and that's all that matters. I think it would be nice if theatergoers came to a play based on what it is and who wrote it and the talent involved. Audiences shouldn't depend on another person's review or opinion."

Simonson isn't troubled by the suggestion that the tumult that has swept Europe in the last year has dated *The Secret Rapture*. He considers the play's explicit references to Thatcher's England too minor to overturn its contemporary significance.

"The play speaks to larger issues than who is the president or the prime minister," he commented. "It's really a play about contemporary morality, and that hasn't changed in the last ten years at all. There's a flux in ideas about morality, and I'm afraid it's changing for the worse. It doesn't seem to be getting better at all."

—David Cohen



Director Eric Simonson grapples with the morality of Thatcher's England in *The Secret Rapture*, opening at Steppenwolf Theatre on September 23.