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Earwitness will bring Nobel laureate's peculiar characters to life *Laurier German Drama Group presents an adaptation of a work by Elias Canetti*

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WATERLOO – An eavesdropper whose uncanny abilities doom innocent people in Nazi-controlled Vienna and an ingratiating houseguest with a curious appetite for furniture are two of the bizarre characters the Laurier German Drama Group will present in a play based on Elias Canetti's *The Earwitness (Der Ohrenzeuge)*.

Playing in the Maureen Forrester Recital Hall at 8:00 p.m. on November 22 and 23, this German-language production will feature an eclectic mix of pantomime, music and dancing. Director Alexandra Zimmermann emphasizes a knowledge of German is not necessary to enjoy the show.

“An English translation of Canetti's short texts are printed in our program and can be read quickly and easily in the little intermissions between acts,” says Zimmermann. “Moreover, images will be displayed parallel to the acting on stage that should explain what's happening.”

Canetti, a Jew who lived in Vienna until fleeing the Nazi regime in 1938, likely had first hand experiences with informers like the Earwitness. And it's the grotesque cosmopolitanism of Canetti's Vienna – with its avant-garde mélange of fascism and high culture – that the drama group will bring to the stage.

“The characters are absurd and comical and I think the jokes are good ... the stricter the regime the funnier the jokes,” says Zimmermann.

The Laurier German Drama Group is made up of language students who under Zimmermann’s direction have created this adaptation of *The Earwitness*, based on the most intriguing five of the 50 character studies Canetti presents in his original text.

The production will feature popular German music from the ’30s, as well as dances ranging from the Vienna Waltz to the more intimate gyrations of a character known as the “Sultan-addict.”

Patience Ryan, who will perform and was also part of the script-writing group that adapted Canetti’s prose for the stage, says creating the play has been a fun way to practice her German.

“We’ve worked really hard putting everything together. It’s very difficult to organize a full play within a matter of three months, but when you have a great team who are motivated and enthusiastic it makes it easier for everyone,” says Ryan. “But, this isn’t just drama. It has to do with German culture and history. The text we derived the play from not only displays the culture of the times, but it’s also a famous work from a literary great.”

Siegfried Schranz, who plays the title character, says the experience of staging the play offers another window on the German language.

“It’s one thing to write compositions and understand the basic grammatical structures, but another to get up in front of a live audience and speak in a different language,” says Schranz. “I think it’s important to experience acting in the language you’re learning as much as it is for you to go to that country and speak it amongst natives. After all, if life’s a stage, why not get a head start on your home turf?”

Canetti (1905-1994) was born to a Sephardic family in Bulgaria but spent his formative years in Vienna, Austria. His varied works, for which he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1981, include a novel, three plays, a travel book, portraits of authors, character studies, and memoirs.

Tickets for *The Earwitness* are \$5 for regular admission and \$3 for students and can be purchased at the door.