'Antigone' confronts issues of idealism, tragic purpose

By Mary Rice

Questions of life, youth, tragedy and duty are ignited by Creighton Theatre's latest production, "Antigone." The Greek tragedy centers on the determination of the daughter of Oedipus to give her infamous brother a proper burial — in defiance of an edict from her Uncle Creon, ruler of Thebes.

As a defiant Antigone, Mary Kelly Arrieta opens her arms wide to a fated death, as the voice of caution is heard from her Uncle Creon (Vito LaBella), "Hold on to Life," Creon pleads with Antigone. "The young let it slip through their fingers like water." Antigone replies by "spitting in the face" of what Creon calls "life" and "happiness."

The small, 14-member cast delivers a strong performance of Jean Anouilh's modernized adaptation of the Greek tragedy. Arrieta embodies, both physically and temperamentally, the immutable heroine. LaBella struts as King Creon would, firm in his resolve to keep order in the chaotic city of Thebes, yet drawn by a negative magnetism to drink in the words of Antigone. Kelly Hitch as Antigone's sister, Ismene, embeds in the viewer the image of a maiden who loves and admires her sister — but who cannot soar like Antigone because of an earth-bound love of happiness and fear.

Played against the starkness of a cave-like backdrop, dim lighting and minimal props, "Antigone" takes Greek tragedy and explores its motives, machinery and character development. The viewer is likely to feel uneasy as he/she observes the idealistic Antigone rush to meet her doom, brushing aside the placations of her uncle.

LaBella as Creon is particularly unnerving, in his convincing portrayal of a ruler who must play "in the dirty kitchen of politics" — and cling to a temporal happiness which is always muted by reason, caution ... and moderation.

Antigone, in addition to dealing with a crisis of personal and civic loyalty, must also confront her femininity. Arrieta screams and throws about her slight frame in a desperate attempt to overcome her feminine "weakness." Life is much easier for the beautiful Ismene; Hitch shifts well later in the play, when Ismene plucks up her cour-

Antigone (Mary Kelly Arrieta) speaks to her sister, Ismene (Kelly Hitch) of the need to give their dead brother a proper burial — in defiance of an edict from Uncle Creon.