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major barbara
by george bernard shaw
opens thursday, february 24

shaw's comic masterpiece
about might and morality

the world premiere of
obie award-winner w. david hancock's
the puzzle locker
opens april 21

specially commissioned by the ur international theatre program & developed with todd theatre students
the university of rochester international theatre program presents

the bald soprano

by eugene ionesco
translated by donald m. allen

directed by sally goers fox
set design by chelsea m. warren
costume design by nadine brooks taylor
lighting design by jeff monheit
sound design by arthur goldfeder

cast

mr. smith..........................nels youngbog
mrs. smith..........................jess davis
mr. martin..........................david pascoe
mrs. martin..........................anna fagan
mary, the maid........................dana mittelman
the fire chief..........................ted limpert
and

mariko tamate

production staff
production stage manager amanda gjerson
assistant stage managers
meredith flouton-barnes/costumes & props
dan cramr/lights
venus maldonado/sound
rachel brown & mike caputo/run crew
master electrician & audio-visual intern rob mygatt
props mistress michelle cohen
props assistant adam machson-carter
assistant director matt johnston

this production lasts 1 hour 15 minutes without intermission
Eugene Ionesco was born in Romania on November 26, 1912. Born to a French mother and a Romanian father, he spent most of his childhood in France before moving to Romania as a teenager and becoming certified to teach French. After getting married in 1938, he returned to France to finish up his doctorate and seek refuge during the war.

About 30 years later, Ionesco would write his first play, spawned from his studies of the English language and the absurdity of his textbooks. The result was *The Bald Soprano*, an existential and absurd meditation on the breakdown of language and the ridiculous nature of social constructions and domestic structures. The success of this first play inspired him to embark upon the creation of a genre of plays he called "anti-plays" which mixed light humorous elements with serious and sometimes tragic themes.

Ionesco went on to write a number of other dramatic works, including *The Chairs*, *The Lesson*, *Man With Bag*, *Rhinoceros*, and *Exit the King*, among many others. Included in his work were theoretical writings such as *Notes and Counterparts* in 1962, *Fragments of a Journal* in 1966, a novel, *Le Soleil*; a film entitled *La Voix* based on the aforementioned novel (Ionesco also played the lead in the film).

Ionesco's plays continue to be produced across the globe both in academic and professional contexts. The stamina of his existential message baffles the mind with its continued relevance, gravitas, and openness to interpretation.

The characters he created and the themes he discussed will quite possibly always be germane to the human condition and the absurdity of everyday social practices.

To even begin to embark on dramatizing the existential void is a daunting task. The landscape is inherently one of desolation, taciturnity, and inaction: three characteristics which do not necessarily lend themselves to theatre's strengths at first glance. But a number of important playwrights embarked on the task in the 1950's in Europe with the hope of taking the theoretical landscape of existentialism and physicalizing those theories on the stage.

At the forefront of this movement was Samuel Beckett and his most famous play, *Waiting for Godot* - a story of two vagrants in the middle of a desolate landscape, apparently waiting for someone (or something) called "Godot." Of course, Godot never comes, and Vladimir and Estragon (the vagrants) never manage to leave the void they are in, though their language often suggests that this is their objective. The characters are stuck in a limbo which restricts their movement, but gives them the license to ask the important existential questions about the specific state they're in.

While Beckett's world is one of desolate, static inquiry, and a search for self, Ionesco's plays create new worlds which are not inhabited by humans and desolation, but instead are atypical, unique, and even bizarre. The situational desolation disconnects characters from their worlds and from each other, and the existential implications thereof inform the characters' subsequent actions on the stage. The result, as one can see in *The Bald Soprano*, is the breakdown of language and destruction of social structures. Vladimir and Estragon start and end in the existential void, never to escape; The Smiths and Martins in *The Bald Soprano* live in the existential void for the duration of the play, but in so doing, they are unknowingly battling themselves and social existence as they know it. In both plays, the characters are at odds with their own existence, but in Beckett they question and make no progress, while in Ionesco they question and are destroyed.

With both Beckett and Ionesco, the characters and the words they speak are hollow and insubstantial. In Beckett the characters are unable to move, paralyzed by their lack of a substantial self. In Ionesco, the characters are always hollered out right from the opening curtain, but now their language is failing them, not even allowing them to be those stereotypes they so covet at earlier points in the play. Theirs is a journey towards death. But time does not exist. The clock has stopped. Death is a luxury these characters do not have.
The “Theatre of the Absurd” was a dramatic movement which arose in the 50's and 60's in Europe. In the post-World War II world, dramatists began to question the conventional aspects of daily life and turned to the stage to vent their frustrations. Theatre during this period used social and theatrical conventions explicitly in the work, so as to bring awareness of its usefulness and futility. The result is a cavalcade of accepted linguistic forms which, though meant to be communication, never ends up achieving its desired result. One character will say something to another and it will never reach its destination, ricocheting right back and thus serving as a critique of its origin. As a result, the character's interactions become absurd as the battle of language is de-molished.

Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like a banana. groucho marx

It is also important to note that this form of theatre comes straight out of the existentialist movement. In an absurdist play, time is frozen, the characters are not conscious of the past or present, and they in fact have none. They exist only within the specific moments of the play and are forced to ask the big questions just to figure out where they are.

the theatre of the absurd

There were many playwrights experimenting with this type of theatre at the time, and each reached their audiences in different ways. Samuel Beckett's absurdism features characters stuck in a wall, unable to move, unable to communicate and hence. Jean Genet's theatre is claustrophobic. His characters tend to be obsessed with death while a war goes on around them. Pinter and Ionesco both dealt a lot with language more overtly. In both The Birthday Party and The Bald Soprano, the characters cannot speak in full sentences at the end of the play. The words take over their entire physical being and are associative at best, thus precipitating the domestic breakdown (indeed, both plays take place in a confined, domestic, stereotypical household). Other playwrights of the time included Jean-Paul Sartre (Last Exit), Slawomir Mrozek ( Tango), Václav Havel (The Garden Party), and Edward Albee (The American Dream), among others.

I've been on a calendar, but I have never been on time. marilyn monroe

The continued relevance of these themes today continues to intrigue theatre artists, and the great plays of the period continue to be performed. Somehow there is always an importance in an exploitation of the futility of language and the formality of everyday life. It's as if the human race keeps forgetting why they go through the motions they do. The "Theatre of the Absurd" (a term coined by British critic, Martin Esslin) continues to shock us, and returns us to a reality where we are forced to question everything.

artist biographies

Sally Goers Fox (Director) has a theatre career spanning three continents, several countries and 30 years. She trained in mime, mask and physical theatre in Europe with (among others) Jerry Grotowski, Etienne Decroux and George Tiberios. She co-founded an award-winning experimental arts center in Bremen Germany, and performed throughout Europe at major festivals on street corners, and in a wide range of places inbetween. She continued creating experimental theatre after moving to the US. Most recently she directed The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe at Theatre of Youth in Buffalo, and Chamber Music at SUNY Buffalo, where she teaches courses related to physical theatre and clowning. She is the recipient of multiple Individual Artist Grants for original work from the NY State Council on the Arts. The most recent of these was for Bird of Passage, a 300-yard long scroll installed along a trail at the southern tip of Hemlock Lake. She has taught in the UR International Theatre Program and assisted with productions since 1985.

Chelsea Warrers (Set Design) is currently studying at Northwestern University, pursuing a MFA in Theatrical Design. A graduate from the University at Buffalo, her design credits include Bird Bath, a production that attended Rencontres International in France, Pandelis: Dido and Aeneas, and Handel's Semele. This past summer Chelsea collaborated with Sally on Bird of Passage, an outdoor installation in Springwater, NY. Chelsea is both honored and excited to be working with Sally Goers Fox again.

Nadine Brooks Taylor (Costume Design) Nadine is a native of the Rochester area and has been working in local theatre for over 10 years. Professionally, she was the stage manager/box office manager for the Rochester Children's Theatre for 3 years and spent 5 years working for the Eastman Opera Theatre as a dresser, wardrobe mistress and costume steward. Currently she is the costume coordinator for the UR International Theatre Program. In her senior year, Nadine and a friend started producing plays for what would become Livonia Community Players. She directed, designed, produced and/or stage managed over 15 plays and musicals with them including Grace (director and designer), Waiting for the Parade (director and Designer), Steel Magnolias (director and designer), Godspell (producer and designer), Jesus Christ Superstar (producer and designer), Our Town (designer), The Diary of Anne Frank (designer), The Red Seed (producer and designer), and Little Shop of Horrors (costume and lighting design). While at Nazareth College, Nadine designed costumes and made up for the mainstage productions of Noah and His Sons and The Empire Builder, as well as costumes for productions of Euphrosyne and The Actor's Nightmare. She has also designed costumes for the Rochester Shakespeare Players (Merry Wives of Windsor) and The Shakespeare Company of Greater Rochester (Macbeth).

Jeff Monheit (Lighting Design) is currently a junior studying to be a geo-mechanical engineer. He has designed light for such productions as The Bald Soprano and The Shakespeare Company of Greater Rochester (Macbeth).

special thanks

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