

UNPAID

A THEATRE TARQUIN PRODUCTION

28/8

Escurial

An exploration of the original text by Michel de Ghelderode

Nicholas Harrington.

Original music & musical direction by

David L. Young.

Included will be an exhibition of paintings by

Rabindra Naidoo & Darren Wardle.

Opening Night:
Thursday 20th May at 8pm

Late show:
Saturday 22nd May at
9:30pm

Matinee:
Sunday 23rd May
& Saturday 29th May at 2pm

Regular shows:
24th~29th May at 8pm

George Paton Gallery,
2nd fl., Union House,
University of Melbourne.



Assisted by the Arts Committee &
Theatre Department of the Melbourne
University Student Union.

Image: Michael Mucci.

Tickets: \$12 Full, \$7 Conc.

Bookings: Ph. 344 7447

ESCURIAL

THE QUEEN

Linda Muirhead

FOLIAL

Frances Forrest

THE MONK

Russell Bywater

CLARINET

Carl Rosman

VIOLIN

Duncan Yardley

EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS BY

Rabindra Naidoo
&
Darren Wardle

Director Nicholas Harrington

Producer Richard Bourke

Original Composition David L. Young

**Production & Stage
Manager** Meg White

**Set Concept &
Design** Nicholas Harrington
& Meg White

Lighting Design John Ford

Lighting Operator Meg White

Costumier Cindy Mortyn

Thanks to:

the Arts Committee, David Blumenthal, Sam Celano & the Porters, Chris Dempsey, Margaret Di Mattina, Pia Di Mattina, the Forrest Family, Fritz Hammersley, Peter, Barbara, Luke & Emily Harrington, Rebecca Hearn, Kelly Heywood, Virginia Jutza, Mary Lamb, Jasmine Lance, Jonathon Marshall, Jenny Pryce, Tom Smith, the Theatre Department, Merryn Tinkler, James Turnbull, Brian Vincent, Mark Watts & Richard Weed.

Very special thanks to:

Sue Strano
&
Rebecca Peniston-Bird

MICHEL de GHELDERODE

Michel de Ghelderode (1898 - 1962) is a little known Flemish playwright who lived on the fringe of the various theatrical movements of his day. A religious iconoclast who described himself as "no more anti-clerical than pro-clerical" he was a solitary figure who found strength and inspiration through isolation.

"I am a man who writes in a room - all alone - and who does not trouble about the fate of his works, who does not allow himself to be bothered by the row, the admiration, or the anger that his works may some day provoke."

Similar to his famous and beloved forefather, Hieronymous Bosch, he became increasingly intrigued with the intrusive and consuming nature of religion in small town Flanders. As with Bosch, Ghelderode's upbringing was awash with religious imagery and the subsequent fear of damnation. His writing reflects his fascination with these influences.

A man of his time, Ghelderode's writing was variously influenced by the literary, music and dramatic movements that had sprung to life at the end of the First World War. In a seeming rejection of the Dada movement, his slowly developing style was to become associated more with the Surrealists than the French Absurdist.

"As a matter of fact, I don't regard myself as either a dramatist or a storyteller, but as a poet who has used the forms of the story and the theatre."

DIRECTORS NOTE

My exploration of Michel de Ghelderode's original text is, I would argue, complementary to the spirit of both the playwrights philosophy of the theatre and to a lesser extent,

the original text. It is no act of 'theatrical treason' to re-interpret and to explore and investigate the original. Responsibility is the only rule.

RITUAL

This production explores themes relating to the rite and passage of ritual. The ritual of death and dying. The ritual of the jest, the ritual of performance. The ritual destroyed.

Ritual is viewed through a film of conflict, through a shattered and bloodied oracle.

DESIGN

Increasingly, I have become aware that my instinct is to produce a design based theatre. Before this production was barely formalised or to be quite honest, before the play was actually read (as opposed to read about), I set out to work with an 'imprisoned space'. I suppose one could say it was a desire to experiment with the notion of physically separating audience and performer, if not an actual obstruction of the normally free flowing 'visual field'.

The apex of the design focus was therefore the theme of imprisonment - of actor, of musician, of audience.

After reading the original text, I set about to physicalize 'the fourth wall' and to formulate a macro design that would encapsulate these themes of imprisonment that were dominating my thoughts. In effecting this aim, I chose to situate the performance in a disused kennel. This idea was derived from a close reading of the original text and a desire to embellish and enlarge a dominant theme within the text. The constant references to the "howling dogs" and the "slaughtering of the packs" provided me with the textual base from which I could develop a design concept. This design concept was also intricately linked with the thematic investigation of the 'imprisonment concept'.

The design concept soon developed a 'micro design' which is reflected in the usage of the boxes/rolling cages. This micro design is a magnification of the macro design. The performers imprisonment is further heightened.

CONFLICT

Dramatic conflict is stated as the essence of Ghelderode's work. In this production, I have attempted to take this idea further in creating a multi-faceted, multi-layered conflict that infiltrates every element, every perspective of both the design and the performance.

Conflict has manifested itself in all the traditional relationships. There is conflict between the observed and the observer, the actor and the design, the observer and the design. The 'right' to see, to connect and even to move freely is partially suspended and thus, a part of the theatrical ritual is challenged. The 'givens' are challenged and a form of re-invention must take place.

The most obvious form of conflict that has been established in this production is the conflict between the observer and the observed - the separation, the physicalizing of the 'fourth wall'. In this artificial and intrusive dynamic, neither party(performer/observed - audience/observer) can passively participate. Both must struggle to 'connect'. Conflict is endemic, the 'given' of the audience as passive participant who sits in the shadows awash with the aural and visual feast is obliterated. Both parties must constantly renegotiate their requisite positions. Conflict becomes the source, the conductor of exploration.

Both parties are on display and indeed, both parties partake in the ritual. Which way the cage is intended to face is dependent upon attitude, upon perspective. Freedom is thus born out of this conflict, as it is borne out of perspective. Conceptually, it is as if there exists a metaphorical mirrored room where the

reflection bounces from wall to wall, where the image is as imprisoned (or as free) as the subject.

It is my intention that this all pervasive conflict will lead to a 'blending', a mutually received experience.

GENDER

In the original text, the cast was to be all male. Thus, the play was about a king, a court jester, a monk and a queen dying off stage. I do not propose to debate gender politics, espouse feminist platitudes or most importantly, write a diatribe in this limited space regarding the 'legitimacy' of such a re-interpretation. Suffice to say, the text was malleable enough to cope with such an interpretation further, there are too few roles for the many talented women actors.

The original text was so strongly gendered that even the simple gender reversal of the leads creates a challenging dissonance between the new characterisations and contemporary sexual mores.

Re-interpreting and reclaiming theatrical texts for those who, historically, either have not been depicted or alternatively, ignored as a silent subject, is a totally valid act.

As a final word, allow me to refer to a comment made by Ghelderode in one of his more ascerbic moments.

"I do in the theatre only that which it pleases me to do, and I have no accounts to render to anyone."

The spirit of that sentiment lives on in this production.

Nicholas Harrington, May 1993.



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