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major barbara
by george bernard shaw
opens thursday, february 24

directed by brooke o'harra

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

production staff
production stage manager amanda giertson
assistant stage managers
meredith flouton-barnes/costumes & props
dan cramer/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 10 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’s plays continue to be produced across the globe in both academic and professional contexts. The stamina of his existential message baffles the mind with its continued relevance, gravity, 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.

Ionesco went on to write a number of other dramatic works, including The Chairs, The Lesson, Man With Bags, Rhinegold, 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 Salutaire in 1973, and a film entitled La Voix based on the aforementioned novel (Ionesco also played the hero in the film).

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 that 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 desolation, 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 hollowed out right from the opening curtain, but now their language is falling them, not even allowing them to be those stereotypes they so covet at earlier points in the play. There 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 uselessness 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 template of language is demolished.

**Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like a banana.** grocho 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 future or past, and they are 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 Peckett's absurdism features characters stuck in a void, unable to move, unable to communicate coherently. 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 by 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), Stanislaw Mrozek (Tango), Vaclav Havel (The Garden Party), and Edward Albee (The American Dream), among others.

**end bulk of paragraph; the beginning of the beginning of the end.**

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.

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

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**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) Jerzy Grotowski, Etienne Decroux and George Taboris. She co-founded an award-winning experimental arts center in Bremen Germany, and performed throughout Europe at major festivals, on streets corners, and in a wide range of places in between. 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 GR UA International Theatre Program and assisted with productions since 1998.

**Chelsea Warren** (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, Purcell's Dido and Aeneas, and Handle's Sense. 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 intern. 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 Grease (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 Bad Seed (producer and designer), and Little Shop of Horrors (costume and lighting design). While at Nazareth College, Nadine designed costumes and make up for the mainstage productions of Noah and His Sons and The Empire Builders, as well as costumes for productions of Equus and The Actors 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 lighting for numerous Todd productions including Pterodactyl, by Nicky Silver, and Ti Pi Py She's a Wore by John Ford. This is his first theatrical sound design. Arthur would like to thank everyone in this production who have made it a pleasure to work on this show.

**special thanks**

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