

**THEATRE FOR A NEW AUDIENCE**



**FRAGMENTS 360°**

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A VIEWFINDER: *Facts and Perspectives on the Play, Playwright, and Production*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## *The Play*

- 3 Overview
- 4 Interpretations of Beckett's Texts
- 6 Beckett's Characters
- 7 Theatre of the Absurd
- 9 Perspectives
- 11 Selected Performance History

## *The Playwright*

- 12 Biography
- 13 Timeline
- 15 Remembering Beckett

## *The Production*

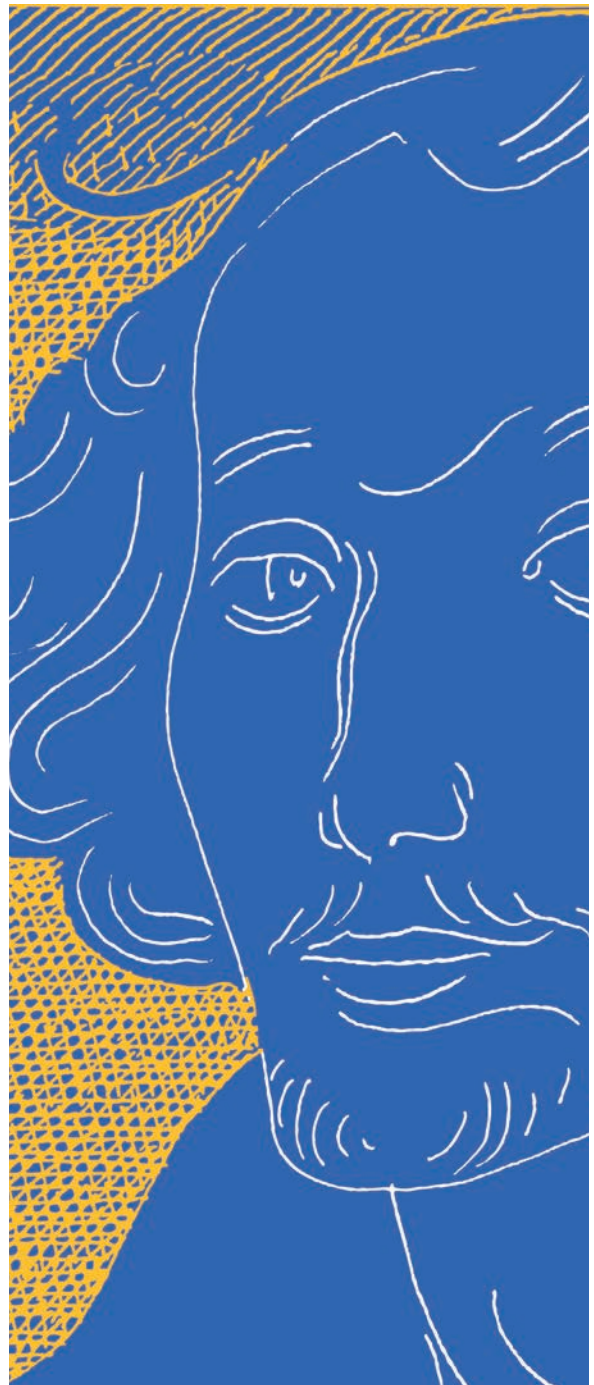
- 16 Director's Note
- 17 Cast and Creative Team

## *Further Exploration*

- 19 Bibliography

## *About Theatre For a New Audience*

- 20 Mission and Programs
- 21 Major Institutional Supporters



## **Notes**

This play guide will be periodically updated with additional information. Play guide last updated November 18, 2011.

## **Credits**

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# THE PLAY: OVERVIEW

## *Fragments*

from texts by Samuel Beckett

In *Fragments*, Peter Brook and Marie-Hélène Estienne interpret texts by Samuel Beckett, one of the greatest playwrights of the 20th century. Samuel Beckett was acclaimed in part for his incomparable concision, his unique mastery of the breathtakingly profound short work.

*Fragments* has been assembled from the following five Beckett shorts: *Rough for Theatre I*, *Rockaby*, *Act Without Words II*, *Neither*, *Come and Go*.

Together, the five works in *Fragments* form a unified whole. There is a kind of cumulative story in this collection, much of which is hidden, either whispered beyond our hearing, or evoked with the broadest brush strokes by characters that either speak in riddles or don't speak at all. Ambiguity and uncertainty—going nowhere and everywhere fast—reign in this dramatic collection, inviting the audience to fill in the particulars, to supply its own insight. There is tremendous humor in *Fragments*—as there is in much of Beckett's writing—which owes much to American silent and early talking films. And yet each piece amuses only those who can be tickled by insights into the foibles of what makes humans human.



Marcello Magni, photo by Pascal Victor / ArtComArt

# THE PLAY: INTERPRETATIONS OF BECKETT'S TEXTS

*Interpretations of the texts of Samuel Beckett can vary widely depending on the reader, the listener, or the watcher. Under Peter Brook and Marie-Hélène Estienne's direction, the texts contain as much joy as despair and could be said to be less existential—as they are often called—and more elemental, vessels containing the distilled essence of humanity. The following brief interpretations, written by Charles Scott Jones, are examinations of the texts—the dialogue and stage directions—as Beckett wrote them; not as Brook and Estienne directed them. They are intended as an introduction to the themes of each short play; themes which may or may not be evident in Fragments.*

## **Rough for Theatre I**

*Written in French in the late 1950s, first published in English translation 1976*

In *Rough for Theatre I*, characters A and B can be regarded as warring natures within one human being or ages of human history. Wheel-chaired B is a representative of Reason, a tyrant seated on a rolling throne. His wheels imply the machinery of industry, and his stick, the tool of a monarch or dictator. He functions with the cooler observations of his eyes as opposed to blind A, who represents Desire. A's playing of the fiddle and longing for his lost instrument, the harp, convey man's Romantic nature. A remembers playing music for alms all day and being lifted from his stool by the hand of a woman. He yearns for romantic love. Their conflicting natures are a part of humanity just as much as sight and hearing.



Marcello Magni and Jos Houben, photo by Pascal Victor / ArtComArt

## **Rockaby**

*Written in English in 1980*

*Rockaby* embodies Beckett's constant exploration of the liminal space between life and death. This short play contains a single, powerful image: the solitary figure of W rocking in her chair, in and out of the spotlight. W, an "old woman" dressed for her own funeral, is accompanied by V, a recording of her own voice that creates the text of the play, sums up her existence in a kind of poem. Significantly, W doesn't blink, but opens and closes her eyes in a rhythm that fits the tempo and spirit of the poem. Her eyes stay closed more and more as her life becomes closed off. The movement of W's eyes and eyelids on stage parallels the imagery of windows and blinds in the poem. And there is the going back and forth between the image on the stage and the figure in the poem, a psychological rocking of viewpoint that culminates with the woman in the poem descending a staircase to sit and become W in the rocker, her own other. The play concludes with the "she" in the poem and W on stage "rocking off" as the two of them become one, just in time to close their eyes for the last time.

## **Act Without Words II**

*Written, according to Beckett, at about the same time as Act Without Words I, 1956; Translated from the French by the author and first published in New Departures, 1959*

*Act Without Words II* is a duel of mannerisms between two men who are unknown to one another. They are linked only by their changing dormant positions. The characters are A and B (not the same A and B of *Rough for Theatre I*). After A finishes his routine, he crawls back into his sack, this time to B's left. After B finishes his routine, he crawls back into his sack, once more to the left of A. The play suggests that this slow-motion sack race will go on forever, a two-man migration across eternity.

## **Neither**

*Written in 1976 after an encounter with American composer Morton Feldman, became the text of the opera Neither composed by Feldman*

At first glance it seems an odd choice to include *Neither* in an evening of Beckett shorts. In a collection of existential sore thumbs, it sticks out as the sorest. But if it is true that "Beckett reputedly said that this was his 'one' text: unsayable, not located in self or in nonself, but in 'neither,'"<sup>1</sup> the poem is perfectly chosen to hold *Fragments* together. The unusual

<sup>1</sup> C. J. Ackerly and S. E. Gontarski, eds., *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A*

## THE PLAY: INTERPRETATIONS OF BECKETT'S TEXTS

life that Beckett lived was as a kind of neither man. He was born and raised an Irishman but lived most of his life in France. He favored writing in his second language, French, and then translated his work into his native English. He excelled in academics but gave up the classroom and teaching to wander through Europe. His life and works reflect a constant going "to and fro," a restless, maddening state of never quite arriving, "as between two lit refuges whose doors once neared gently close, once away turned from gently part again."<sup>2</sup> *Neither* is characterless except in the theme that it poses: the ceaseless wandering of human consciousness between the self and non-self that finds safe harbor in neither.

### *Come and Go*

*Classified by Beckett as a dramaticule,<sup>3</sup> written in English in 1965*

The three women in *Come and Go* differ only by the color of their coats and slight variation in their utterances. They have monosyllabic names that are short for conventional names: Vi (iolet), Flo (rence), Ru (by). They demonstrate the adage "two's company, three's a crowd." Their comic shuffling and whispering secrets about the missing third is augmented by Beckett's gallows humor. "All Beckett lives are dyings, [and] some of the dying contrive to ignore the fact,"<sup>4</sup> as Hugh Kenner states. Flo, Vi, and Ru speak of mortality in regards to the absent third ("Does she not realize? / Has she not been told? / Does she not know?"), though each of them at some point is the absent third, and each of them is dying. Kenner notes that in Beckett's world women especially ignore that they are dying.<sup>5</sup> The answering refrain of "God grant not / God forbid / Please God not" is a kind of punch-line to a joke that is mostly inaudible, but comic nevertheless because it hints at mortality's secret; a secret that is both understood and denied.

<sup>1</sup> *Reader's Guide to his Works, Life, and Thought*. New York: Grove Press, 2004. Page 404.

<sup>2</sup> The prose-poem "Neither" appears in Samuel Beckett, *Samuel Beckett: The Grove Centenary Edition*, vol. IV (New York: Grove Press, 2006), 426.

<sup>3</sup> Defined as a tiny or insignificant drama

<sup>4</sup> Hugh Kenner, *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux; London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 51.

<sup>5</sup> Kenner, *A Reader's Guide*, 51.



Jos Houben, Kathryn Hunter, and Marcello Magni, photo by Graham Michael

# THE PLAY: BECKETT'S CHARACTERS

It would seem to follow that a modern playwright who de-emphasizes story or plot lines in his plays would emphasize character. With Beckett this is not the case. Beckett's characters—in the short plays of *Fragments*, and in his later works—are not characters in the conventional sense. In 1988, East German playwright Heiner Mueller, once referred to as “a Beckett of the East,” explained, “Beckett's texts come out of the experience of a history-less world. For his characters there was no history and there won't be any.”<sup>1</sup> This thought is exemplified by Godot, Beckett's most celebrated character, who never shows up to relieve the play's expectant characters. But whether it's the invisible presence of Godot or other of his many corporeal characters, Beckett peopled his drama with mythic types, beings whose nature is primordial rather than historical. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir sums this up: “But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it our not.”<sup>2</sup>

When Alan Schneider, the director of the first American production of *Waiting for Godot*, asked what or who was meant by “Godot,” Beckett answered that if he knew about Godot he would have put it in the play.<sup>3</sup> As if in search of Godot themselves, some scholars have noted similarities between Beckett's Godot and the “Godeau” of *Mercadet*, a play written by French novelist and playwright Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850). *Mercadet* concludes with the arrival of its own much-awaited Godeau, who brings with him a huge fortune that saves his former partner from financial ruin. It is possible Beckett had Balzac's Godeau—the savior who arrives just in time—in mind as the antithesis of Godot—the unknown someone who never arrives.<sup>4</sup>

Beckett does seem to have been influenced in a negative sense by Balzac; the result of which was a reaction to or rebellion against the methods of the classical French author. Even as a young writer who penned the story collection *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934), Beckett chafed against the kind of fixed characterization he found in Balzac's fiction, referring to the novelist's characters as “clockwork cabbages.” He complained that Balzac could write the end to one of his novels after finishing the first paragraph because of the finite nature of the characters and his “absolute mastery” of the “chloroformed world.”<sup>5</sup> Far from being particular and finite, inhabitants of Beckett's dramatic works represent the human condition in its entirety. Their names or lack of names are indicators of the playwright's design: to display rubrics of humanity in a state beyond social or historical circumstance.

Richard Gilman has suggested that Hamm and Clov of *Endgame* (1956) are not symbols of a social dynamic that must exist in all human relations, the one dominant and the other submissive, but “one consciousness or locus of being akin to the narrator in Beckett's fiction.”<sup>6</sup> In support of this is Hamm's soliloquy: “Then babble, babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together and whisper together, in the dark.”<sup>7</sup> This idea of a child creating imaginary friends to play with is, in a sense, how all playwrights populate their plays. But Beckett takes this splintered, yet unified view of the human condition to the extreme in his short plays, which are peopled with experimental characters acting as facets of one consciousness.



Samuel Beckett in Paris by John Minihan



Honoré de Balzac, 1841 by Felix Nadar



Buster Keaton and Samuel Beckett on the set of *Film*, 1964

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Kalb, *The Theatre of Heiner Müller* (New York: Limelight Editions, 2001), 165.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Beckett, *The Collected Works of Samuel Beckett: Volume III, Dramatic Works* (New York: Grove Press, 2010), 70.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Third Edition (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., 2004), 44.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Bentley, *What is Theatre?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), 158.

<sup>5</sup> Hugh Kenner, *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux; London: Thames and Hudson, 1973) 53

<sup>6</sup> Richard Gilman, *The Making of Modern Drama: A Study of Büchner, Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Pirandello, Brecht, Beckett, Hanke* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 256.

<sup>7</sup> *Endgame* quoted in Gilman, *The Making of Modern Drama*, 257.

# THE PLAY: THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

For better or worse, Samuel Beckett has been aligned with absurdism since the Theatre of the Absurd as a category was popularized by Martin Esslin in his influential critical work of the same name. First published in 1962, *The Theatre of the Absurd* is a study of post-World War II dramatists living in France who wrote anti-logical plays that defied audience expectations. Its main figures are Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Arthur Adamov. Later, Esslin added Harold Pinter to his first tier of absurdists.

Esslin traces the origins of absurdist theatre to Albert Camus's philosophical treatise, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), written during the Nazi occupation of Paris. Camus equates the human condition with the plight of Sisyphus, his endless struggle to push a boulder uphill only to have it roll back down once he nears the top. In *Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus states:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity.<sup>1</sup>

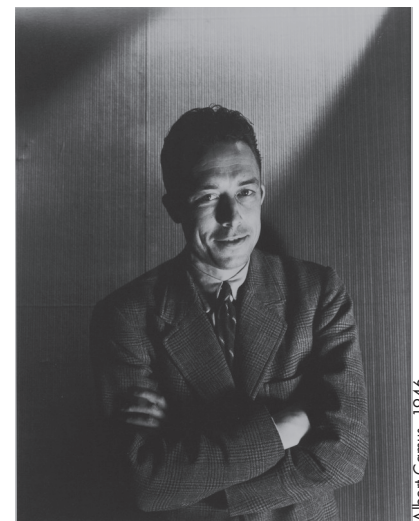
Absurdism's alleged practitioners, however, did not enjoy the label. Ionesco complained that "absurd" was a fashionable term "vague enough to mean nothing anymore and to be an easy definition of anything." He considered the world "not absurd, but incredible."<sup>2</sup> Adamov was even more adamantly opposed to the label and wrote, "Life is not absurd, only difficult, very difficult."<sup>3</sup> Beckett commented that the label was "about as vague as Cubism and Fauvism."<sup>4</sup> In general, the authors who were deemed absurdists felt that the Theatre of the Absurd was too broad and that it included just about any dramatist of the time whose plays were deemed anti-logical. Esslin, in the revised preface of the 1968 edition of *Theatre of the Absurd*, wonders if he should feel pride, or hide his head in shame.

Still, the label has become part of the popular vocabulary and it is useful. Marvin Carlson points out that Beckett, Ionesco, and the early Adamov were not united by a commonly held attitude toward existence, but by what they rejected in their stage practice: "the accepted conventions of the traditional French theatre, the emphasis upon the word, the linkage of cause and effect, a bias toward realism, and the psychological development of character."<sup>5</sup>

Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano*, written in 1948 and produced two years later, was the first important absurdist play produced after the war and was directed by Nicholas Bataille at the Théâtre des Noctambules. Writing about the genesis of *The Bald Soprano*, Ionesco stated that he did not set out to be a dramatist. He set out to learn English and failed. And out of his failure, he wrote a play.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the contrite Beckett who almost never gave interviews, Ionesco was



Martin Esslin



Albert Camus, 1946



Arthur Adamov, 1947 by Denise Colomb

<sup>1</sup> *The Myth of Sisyphus* quote from Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Third Edition (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., 2004), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Ionesco, *Notes and Counternotes*, trans. Donald Watson (London: John Calder, 1964), 224.

<sup>3</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greek to the Present* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), 411.

<sup>4</sup> Ackerly, C. J. and Gontarski, S. E., eds., *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to his Works, Life, and Thought* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre*, 412.

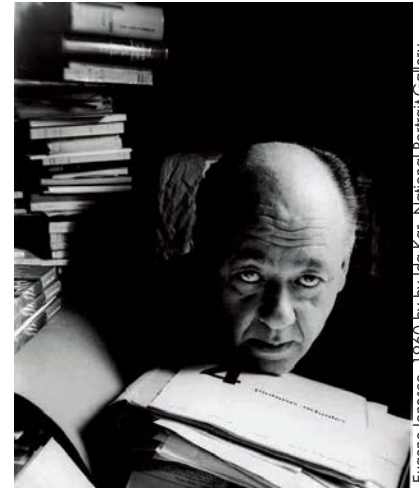
<sup>6</sup> Ionesco, *Notes and Counternotes*, 181.

## THE PLAY: THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

no stranger to expounding theatre theory. Commenting about his process as dramatist in 1954, he said his goal was to strip the action of “all that is particular to it: the plot, the accidental characteristics of the characters, their names, their social setting and historical background, the apparent reasons for the dramatic conflict.” Freed from the distraction of “social crust and discursive thought,” he could focus on “theatre from within.”<sup>7</sup>

The most celebrated play in *The Theatre of the Absurd* is *Waiting for Godot*. Within five years of its modest beginning in 1953 at the small Théâtre of Babylone in Paris, it was translated into more than twenty languages and seen by more than a million spectators worldwide. In 1957 the San Francisco Actors’ Workshop performed *Godot* for fourteen-hundred prisoners at San Quentin Penitentiary. The director Herbert Blau, unsure of how the audience would receive *Godot*, introduced the play by comparing it to jazz, “to which one must listen for whatever one may find in it.” And, as Esslin details in the Introduction to *The Theatre of the Absurd*, the inmates immediately understood the play, having known so well what it was to wait.<sup>8</sup>

What separates the work of Beckett, Ionesco, and Pinter are the plays’ hidden subjects and how the disparate subjects are manifested. At age eleven Ionesco wrote a play about seven or eight children who have tea together. After tea, they smash all the cups, then the plates, then all the furniture, and finally throw their parents out the windows. Ionesco admitted in an interview that this pattern of acceleration, proliferation, and destruction was a part of personal rhythm reflected in much of his work.<sup>9</sup> In Pinter’s first play, *The Room*, he introduces the Kafka-inspired tension, the escalating fear between characters that is evident in much of his work.<sup>10</sup> The subject of Beckett’s plays is perhaps best expressed as modern man’s collective identity crisis, the human compulsion for wandering and searching and not quite finding a place of relief. To some extent the methods of these playwrights have been absorbed into contemporary playwriting. Plays with the absurdist label are still popular today. *Waiting for Godot*, Pinter’s *The Homecoming*, and Ionesco’s *Exit the King* have all been on Broadway in recent memory.



Eugene Ionesco, 1960 by Ida Kar, National Portrait Gallery, London



Harold Pinter, 1962 by Cecil Beaton, Nation Portrait Gallery, London



Samuel Beckett, 1965 by Dmitri Kasterine, National Portrait Gallery, London

<sup>7</sup> Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre*, 412.

<sup>8</sup> Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Claude Bonnefoy, *Conversations with Eugene Ionesco*, trans. Jan Dawson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 57.

<sup>10</sup> Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd*, 235



## THE PLAY: PERSPECTIVES

The following quotes are selected perspectives on Beckett and his work from notable scholars and artists.

“Man would sooner have the void for his purpose than be devoid of purpose,” said Nietzsche, and he took it for granted that his readers would grasp the implication: in reality man just is devoid of purpose. The trouble is that while one can assent to that intellectually it is almost impossible to assent to it emotionally—which, of course, is what the aphorism says. Yet for the writer who truly does so, what is there left to do? To embody his insight in a work of art is to deny it even as he asserts it, since art means form and form means purpose. That has been the problem Beckett has struggled with from the beginning of his career.

(GABRIEL JOSIPOVICI, REVIEWING *WAITING FOR GODOT*)

B. – I speak of an art turning from [the plane of the feasible] in disgust, weary of its puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road.

D. – And preferring what?

B. – The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.

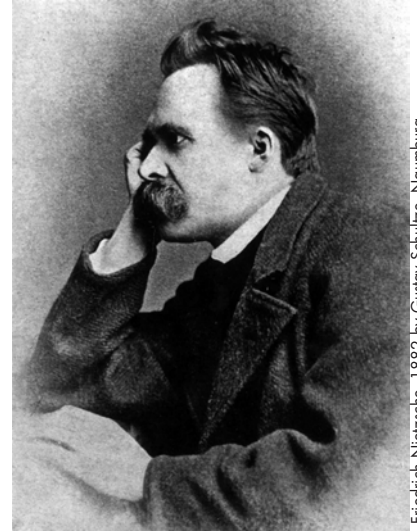
(SAMUEL BECKETT, “THREE DIALOGUES”)

The farther [Beckett] goes the more good it does me. I don’t want philosophies, tracts, dogmas, creeds, way outs, truths, answers, nothing from the bargain basement. He is the most courageous, remorseless writer going and more he grinds my nose in the s\*\*t the more I am grateful to him.

(HAROLD PINTER, LETTER TO A FRIEND)

The opening line of [*Come and Go*,] ‘When did we three last meet?’ recalls, of course, the meeting of the three witches in *Macbeth*. But Beckett’s three women look back on an unfulfilled past, as well as forward to a doomed future—their own rather than that of any other person in the drama. No particular period of past time is alluded to, although with their rather precise, archaic mode of speech and the somber uniformity and muted colouring of their drab costumes they seem like middle-class ladies from the recent past. Their names, Flo, Vi and Ru recall flowers (Flora, Violet and Rue), the latter reminding one of Ophelia’s madness scene with Laertes in *Hamlet*. Superficially they may make us think of the Three Graces as they link hands, but, more precisely, they resemble in appearance the three mothers in Fritz Lang’s *M*, a film much loved by Beckett.

(JAMES KNOWLSON AND JOHN PILLING, *FRESCOES OF THE SKULL*)



Friedrich Nietzsche, 1882 by Gustav Schulze, Naumburg



Harold Pinter in *Krapp's Last Tape* directed by Ian Rickson, 2006



Grieving mothers in Fritz Lang's film, *M*, 1931

## THE PLAY: PERSPECTIVES

The “more” is not just for the voice. [It’s] for the rocking as well. You want the “more.” The “more” is to get the rocking. I want to be rocked. I want to be lulled, because who is doing the rocking? Your memory. Your Mom. . . . the “more” is: I want to be rocked, by the voice and by the chair. I want to be rocked to sleep, rocked off to sleep, by this memory. The memory is going to rock me off. So you’re asking, the baby is saying, “Do this to me, don’t stop.” And it is getting a little bit less able, your voice—you—are being a little bit less able to do that each time.

(ALAN SCHNEIDER, DIRECTING BILLIE WHITELAW IN *ROCKABY*)

Economy—concentration upon essentials—is one of the hallmarks of supreme artistry. Throughout his life as a writer Beckett has striven to reach the utmost degree of economy and density. Dramatic forms of presentation tend to be more economical than mere narrative, for here the images, which need to be described in discursive prose, can be made concrete and instantly perceptible on the stage. Drama of the kind Beckett writes is poetry of concrete, three-dimensional stage images, complex metaphors communicable in a flash of visual intuitive understanding.

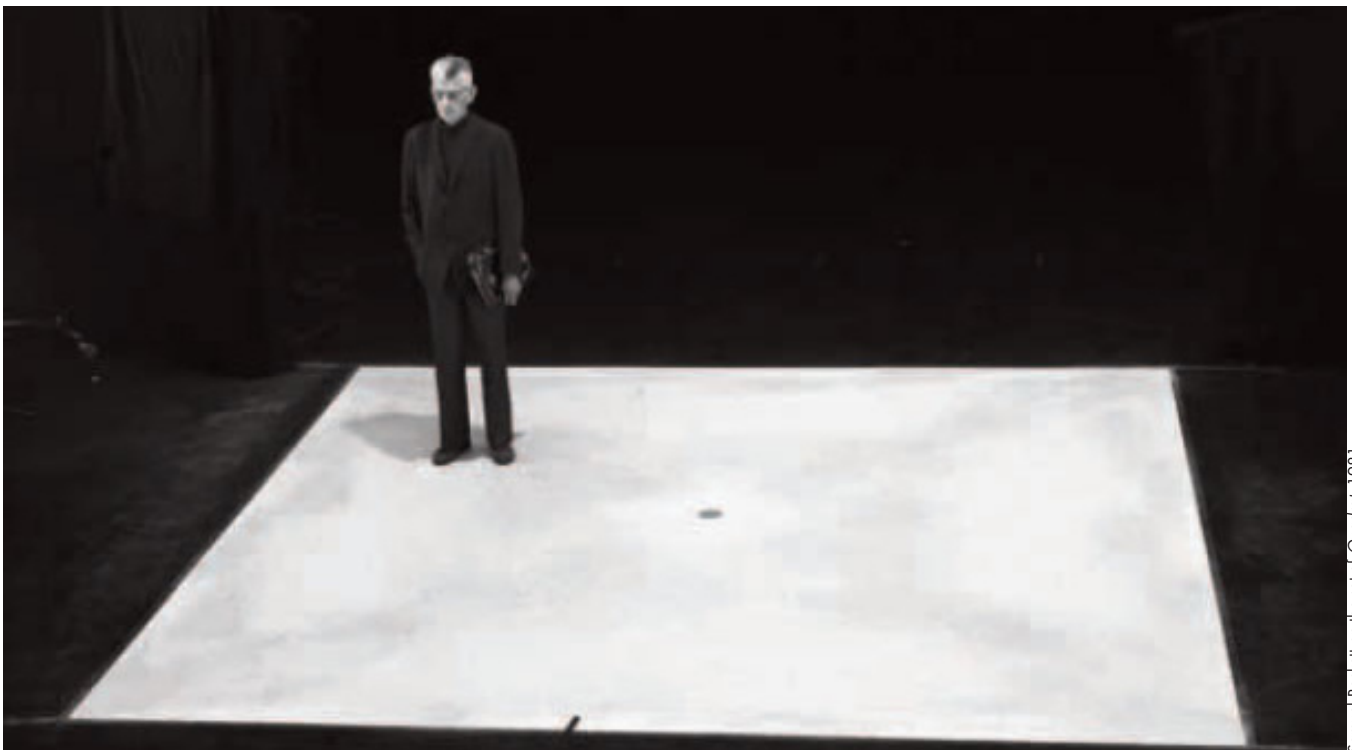
(MARTIN ESSLIN, “A THEATRE OF STASIS”)

Perhaps the most intense and personal writing of our time comes from Samuel Beckett. Beckett’s plays are symbols in an exact sense of the word. A false symbol is soft and vague: a true symbol is hard and clear. When we say ‘symbolic’ we often mean something drearily obscure: a true symbol is specific, it is the only form a certain truth can take.

(PETER BROOK, *THE EMPTY SPACE*)



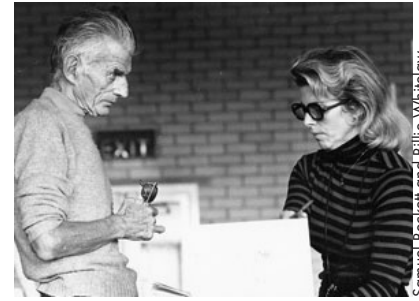
Beckett and Alan Schneider, 1964



Samuel Beckett on the set of *Quadra*, 1981

## THE PLAYS: SELECTED PERFORMANCE HISTORY

- 1960 *Act Without Words II* is performed at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.
- 1963 *Act Without Words II* is produced in French in Ulm-Donau, Germany, along with *Act Without Words I*, as *Mimes 1 and 2*. Deryk Mendel directs the German version of the two mimes, "Spiel," and plays in both.
- 1966 *Come and Go* is first produced as *Kommen und Gehen*, translated by Elmar Tophoven, at the Schiller-Theatre Werkstatt, Berlin.
- 1968 *Come and Go* is first performed in English at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin, in February, and then at the Royal Festival Hall, London, in December. 1976 Paul Joyce makes a film of *Act Without Words II* and titled it *The Goad*.
- 1977 *Neither* is set to music by Morton Feldman and premiered at the Rome Opera. It is first published in the program for that production.
- 1981 *Rockaby* is first performed in Buffalo, New York with Billie Whitelaw as W and V, directed by Alan Schneider, produced by Dan Labeille.
- 1986 *Rough for Theatre I* is staged as "Fragment for Theatre I" at the Magic Theater, San Francisco by S. E. Gontarski, with Tom Luce as B and Robert Wagner as A, in an evening of one-acters called *The Beckett Vision*.
- 2007-2011 Peter Brook and Marie-Hélène Estienne's direction of *Fragments* first appears in September, at The Young Vic, London, starring Kathryn Hunter, Marcello Magni, and Khalifa Natour. *Fragments* tours internationally with different cast members at various respective locations. Cast members include Hayley Carmichael, Jos Houben, Kathryn Hunter, Marcello Magni, Bruce Myers, Khalifa Natour, and Yoshi Oida. Theatre for a New Audience, in association with Baryshnikov Arts Center, presents the New York premiere of *Fragments* in November 2011.



Samuel Beckett and Billie Whitelaw rehearsing before Alan Schneider's 1981 production of *Rockaby*



Khalifa Natour and Marcello Magni, photo by Alastair Muir

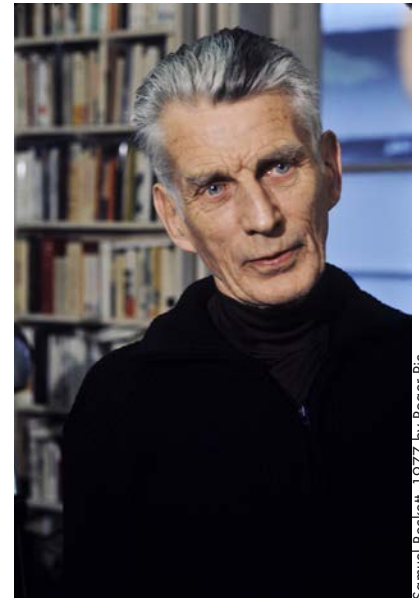
## THE PLAYWRIGHT: BIOGRAPHY

Samuel Beckett was born in 1906 in the Dublin suburb of Foxrock, to a middle-class Protestant family of comfortable means. He attended the prestigious Portora Royal School and Trinity College, where he excelled in French and Italian, then taught briefly at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. There he moved in the circle of artists and writers around James Joyce and began writing prose and poetry. He traveled widely in Europe in the 1930s—including Germany under the Nazis—and ultimately settled in Paris for the rest of his life. In 1946, he was awarded the Croix de Guerre for his work with the French Resistance.

Feeling that World War II had wasted his precious time and energies, Beckett withdrew into creative seclusion afterwards, producing a torrent of astonishingly powerful and original prose, including the introspective, formally challenging, darkly hilarious novel trilogy *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*. These books—written in French, in which Beckett said it was easier to write “without style”—were ignored or dismissed when they appeared, then later hailed as paradigm-changing masterpieces and literary landmarks.

Beckett first turned to drama as a break from the novel-writing he considered his real work, but it soon became much more than a sideline. The international success of *Waiting for Godot*—his play about two tramp-like characters filling time while waiting for someone who never comes, premiered in 1953—made him a public figure and ensured his continued involvement in theatre despite his shyness and distaste for publicity. He went on to refine his dramatic vision in *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and other plays that featured similarly derelict, castoff characters trapped in starkly desolate and symbolic situations. These works permanently altered the Western world's perception of the nature and purpose of dramatic art. Beckett received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1969.

After the 1960s, Beckett pushed his exploration of theatrical minimalism still further. His later plays, such as *Rockaby*, *Ohio Impromptu* and *Not I*, are masterpieces of concision: short, intimate, starkly metaphorical works in which punctiliously sculptured stage images are juxtaposed with flows of words that bear richly ambiguous relationships to the images. In the same period, he experimented with precisely delineated, mysteriously cyclical movement patterns in works such as *Come and Go*, *Footfalls* and *What Where*. Beckett died in 1989, widely considered the 20th century's greatest dramatist.



Samuel Beckett, 1977 by Roger Pic

# THE PLAYWRIGHT: TIMELINE

The following is a timeline of relevant events from the life of Samuel Beckett. Over the course of his life, Beckett was a prolific writer. Only a very select number of his publications have been included. From Jennifer M. Jeffers, ed., *Samuel Beckett: A Casebook*.<sup>1</sup>

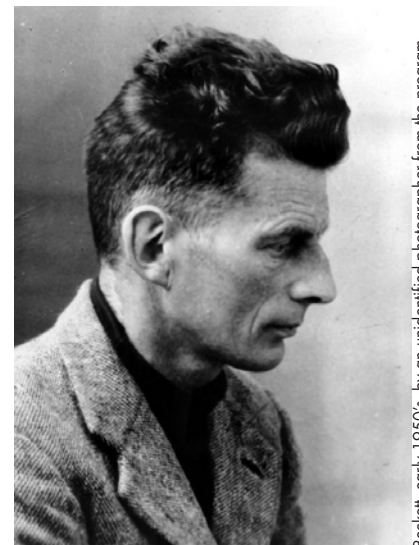
- 1906 Samuel Barclay Beckett is born to William Frank and Mary Roe Beckett at the family residence, Cooldrighagh, in Foxrock, South Dublin.
- 1923 Enters Trinity College, Dublin, where he majors in French and Italian.
- 1927 Graduates from Trinity in December with a B.A., first in class and awarded a Gold Medal.
- 1928 Teaches French and English for a term at Campbell College, Belfast; becomes lecteur of English at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris.
- 1930 The poem "Whoroscope" is published; returns to Trinity as a lecturer in French.
- 1932 Begins first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (published posthumously in 1992).
- 1933 Beckett's father dies of a heart attack.
- 1934 Moves to London to write and seeks counseling for grief and depression. *More Pricks Than Kicks* published by Chatto and Windus.
- 1938 In Paris, he is stabbed in the chest by a pimp. Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil visits him in the hospital, and they start a serious relationship; the novel *Murphy* published by Routledge.
- 1939 England declares war on Germany.
- 1940 France falls to Germany.
- 1941 Beckett joins Resistance in Paris.
- 1942 Beckett and Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil flee Paris and go into hiding.
- 1945 Beckett and Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil return to Ireland and join the Irish Red Cross; Beckett awarded the Croix de Guerre for his role in Resistance.
- 1946 Begins writing novels in French (*Mercier et Camier*).
- 1950 Beckett's mother dies.
- 1952 *En attendant Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*) published by Editions de Minuit.
- 1953 Roger Blin directs the first performance of *Godot* at the Théâtre de Babylone.



Beckett in his cricket uniform, 1910's



Beckett at Trinity College, late 1920's, The Estate of Samuel Beckett

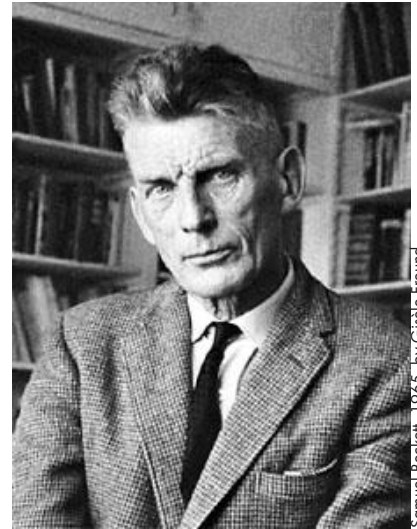


Beckett, early 1950's by an unidentified photographer from the program for the first French production of *En Attendant Godot*

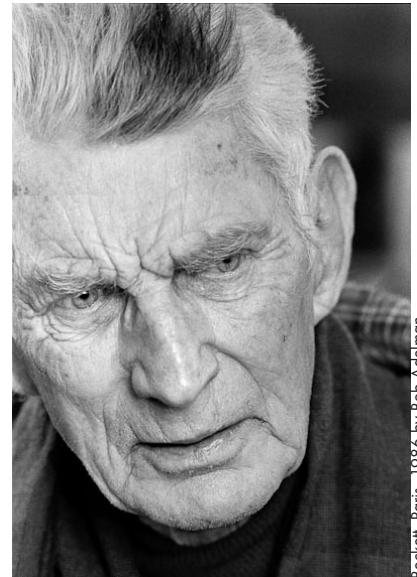
<sup>1</sup> (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998) xiii-xviii.

## THE PLAYWRIGHT: TIMELINE

- 1955 The first English production of *Godot* begins in London.
- 1956 *Godot*, directed by Alan Schneider, opens in Miami and half the audience walks out between acts; *Waiting for Godot* is published by Faber and Faber in London.
- 1958 Beckett begins *Krapp's Last Tape*; *Endgame* is performed at The Royal Court Theatre.
- 1960 Moves to Boulevard St. Montparnasse, his Paris home for the remainder of his life.
- 1961 Officially marries Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil; Co-winner of the Prix International des Editeurs (with Jorge Luis Borges).
- 1964 Comes to New York City for filming of *Film* with Buster Keaton, directed by Alan Schneider.
- 1969 Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.
- 1972-1982 Continues to write plays in English and French; directs for theatre and television.
- 1989 Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil dies in July; Beckett follows her in December.



Samuel Beckett, 1965, by Gisele Freund



Beckett, Paris, 1986 by Bob Adelman

# THE PLAYWRIGHT: REMEMBERING BECKETT

The follow firsthand accounts are found in *Beckett Remembering / Remembering Beckett: A Centenary Celebration* by James and Elizabeth Knowlson<sup>1</sup> unless otherwise specified.

One day, George Plimpton, the editor of *The Paris Review* in New York, approached me to do an interview with Beckett for the series 'Writers at Work'. He offered to send me to Paris. I told Plimpton that Beckett never gave interviews, and besides I would not want to impose on him with such a request. But the next day I wrote to Sam saying that even though I knew he would say no, I could not resist asking him since *The Paris Review* would pay all my expenses for one week in Paris, this way we could have a couple of good expensive meals with excellent wine at his favourite restaurant, and pretend to do an interview. Sam's answer was only one line: "Dear Raymond, Sorry, I have no views to inter."

—RAYMOND FEDERMAN IN THE EARLY 1970S

. . . evenings with Beckett were often lively, fascinating occasions. This was partly because he was so witty and could laugh at himself, as well as at funny things that occurred. I once knocked my empty glass off the table in the American Bar at the Coupole and, to my acute embarrassment, it broke into a thousand pieces on the tiled floor. "It's not serious. The glass was empty at the time," was Beckett's speedy rejoinder.

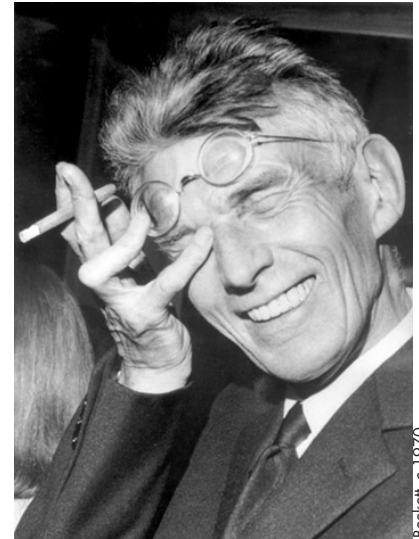
—JAMES KNOWLSON

The two things he seemed most interested in, to do with me, were my (then) forthcoming child and my interest in tennis and golf. Whenever I mentioned any of these subjects, his face broke into a warm smile and my memory is that he nodded. . . His eyes are the brightest blue with what I would swear are black crosses in the middle of them. . . He said he had no children which was "fortunate for them."

—MICHAEL RUDMAN

Some months before Samuel Beckett's death on 22 December 1989, a story was circulating in Paris. An elderly woman points out an old gentleman she has sighted. "That's Samuel Beckett," she says to a friend, "the author of *Waiting for Godot*." Beckett whose hearing is more acute than she presumes, answers from afar: "Yes, and I am still waiting."

—ALAN ASTRO (*UNDERSTANDING SAMUEL BECKETT*)



Beckett, c. 1970



Photograph of Beckett's bookshelves in the his apartment, Boulevard St. Jacques, Paris, by John Minihan.



Beckett by John Minihan

<sup>1</sup> (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2006)

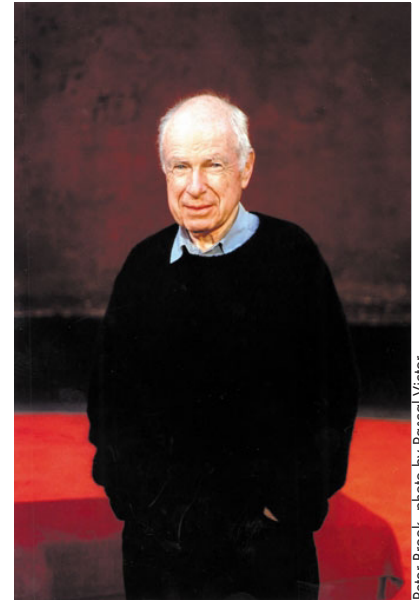
## THE PRODUCTION: DIRECTOR'S NOTE

### ABOUT BECKETT

Beckett was a perfectionist, but can one be a perfectionist without an intuition of perfection? Today, with the passage of time, we see how false were the labels first stuck on Beckett—despairing, negative, pessimistic. Indeed, he peers into the filthy abyss of human existence. His humour saves him and us from falling in, he rejects theories, dogmas, that offer pious consolations, yet his life was a constant, aching search for meaning.

He situates human beings exactly as he knew them in darkness. Constantly they gaze through windows, in themselves, in others, outwards, sometimes upwards, into the vast unknown. He shares their uncertainties, their pain. But when he discovered theatre, it became a possibility to strive for unity, a unity in which sound, movement, rhythm, breath and silence all come together in a single rightness. This was the merciless demand he made on himself—an unattainable goal that fed his need for perfection. Thus he enters the rare passage that links the ancient Greek theatre through Shakespeare to the present day in an uncompromising celebration of one who looks truth in the face, unknown, terrible, amazing ...

—Peter Brook



Peter Brook, photo by Pascal Victor



Photo by Ernesto Rodrigues Agencia Estado



# THE PRODUCTION: CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

## CREATIVE TEAM

### Peter Brook (Director)

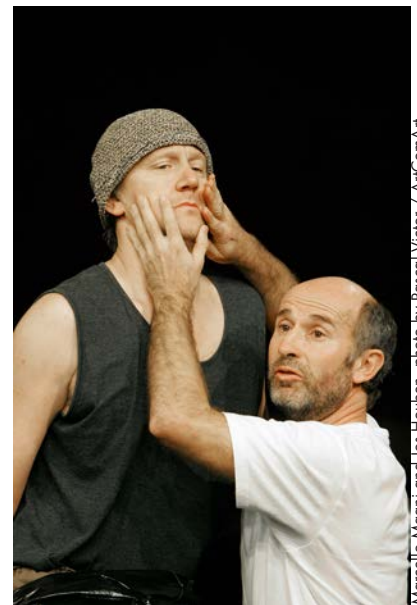
was born in London in 1925. He directed his first play there in 1943. He then went on to direct over 70 productions in London, Paris and New York. His work with the Royal Shakespeare Company includes *Love's Labour's Lost* (1946), *Measure for Measure* (1950), *Titus Andronicus* (1955), *King Lear* (1962), *Marat/Sade* (1964), *US* (1966), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1970) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1962), (1978). In 1971, he founded the International Centre for Theatre Research in Paris and in 1974, opened its permanent base in the Bouffes du Nord Theatre. There, he directed *Timon of Athens*, *The Ik*, *Ubu aux Bouffes*, *Conference of the Birds*, *L'Os*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Mahabharata*, *Woza Albert!*, *The Tempest*, *The Man Who*, *Qui est là?*, *O! les Beaux Jours*, *Je suis un Phénomène*, *Le Costume*, *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, *Far Away*, *La Mort de Krishna*, *Ta Main dans la Mienne*, *Le Grand Inquisiteur*, *Tierno Bokar*, and *Sizwe Banzi is dead*—many of these performing both in French and English. In opera, he directed *La Bohème*, *Boris Godounov*, *The Olympians*, *Salomé* and *Le Nozze de Figaro* at Covent Garden; *Faust* and *Eugene Onegin* at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, *La Tragédie de Carmen* and *Impressions of Pelleas*, at the Bouffes du Nord, Paris and *Don Giovanni* for the Aix en Provence Festival. Peter Brook's autobiography, *Threads of Time*, was published in 1998 and joins other titles including *The Empty Space* (1968)—translated into over 15 languages, *The Shifting Point* (1987), *Evoking (and Forgetting) Shakespeare* (2002), and *There are No Secrets* (1993). His films include *Lord of the Flies*, *Marat/Sade*, *King Lear*, *Moderato Cantabile*, *The Mahabharata* and *Meetings with Remarkable Men*.

### Marie-Hélène Estienne (Director)

has taken part in many theatre and cinema projects as an author and a production assistant. While a journalist at *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, she became Michel Guy's assistant, working on the programming of the Paris Festival d'Automne. In 1974, she worked on the casting of Peter Brook's *Timon of Athens*. She joined C.I.C.T. in 1977 for *Ubu aux Bouffes* and has since been production assistant for all the Centre's work. She was also Brook's assistant for *La Tragédie de Carmen* and *The Mahabharata* and artistic collaborator for *The Tempest*, *Impressions de Pelléas* and more recently *The Tragedy of Hamlet* (2000). This collaboration developed to include dramaturgy for *Woza Albert!*, *The Man Who*, and *Qui est là?*. She co-authored, with Peter Brook, *Je suis un Phénomène*, presented at Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord (1998). She produced the French language adaptation of *Le Costume* ("The Suit") by Can Themba, created in 1999 at Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord as well as *Far Away*, by Caryl Churchill in 2002. She collaborated on the directing and co-created with Jean Claude Carrière the texts for *La Tragédie d'Hamlet* (2002) and *La Mort de Krishna*. She recently created the French adaptation of *Ta main dans la mienne* by Carol Rocamora. In 2003, she wrote the theatrical adaptation of *Le Grand Inquisiteur* by Dostoïevski and in 2004, *Tierno Bokar* from Amadou Hampaté Bâ's works. She lately adapted to French the play *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona.

### Philippe Vialatte (Lighting Designer)

started at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in 1985 as a light operator on *The Mahabharata*, directed by Peter Brook. He assisted Jean Kalman for the light design of *Woza Albert!* and *La Tempête*, directed by Peter Brook. Since the creation of *The Man Who* in Paris in 1993, he has designed the lights for all the plays directed by Peter Brook in the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord: *Qui est là?*, *Je suis un phénomène*, *Le Costume*, *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, *Far Away*, *La Mort de Krishna*, *La Tragédie d'Hamlet*, *Ta main dans la mienne*, *Tierno Bokar*, *Le Grand Inquisiteur*, *Sizwe Banzi Est Mort*, *Fragments*, 11 and 12 and recently *A Magic Flute*. He follows all these plays on tour and in each space redesigns and adapts the light of each show.



Marcello Magni and Jos Houben, photo by Pascal Victor / ArtComArt



Kathryn Hunter, photo by Graham Michael



Kathryn Hunter and Jos Houben, photo by Graham Michael

## THE PRODUCTION: CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

### CAST

#### Jos Houben

studied at L'École Jacques Lecoq with Philippe Gaulier, Monika Pagneux and Pierre Byland. He is a certified practitioner of the Feldenkrais Method—Awareness Through Movement. An original member of Complicité, he co-created and performed in *A Minute Too Late* and collaborated on many other projects with Annabel Arden, Simon McBurney and Lilo Baur. Jos was a director and co-writer of cult comedy troupe The Right Size (which has won Laurence Olivier Awards for Best Entertainment in 1999 and Best New Comedy in 2002) playing in the West End and Off-Broadway. For Thames TV he created and performed "Mr. Fixit," a silent slapstick TV comedy for children. He was also creative director and associate producer for Ragdoll TV's "Brum: The Magical Little Car." He created and performed *Quatre Mains*, a theatre piece for four hands with Andrew Dawson. Jos collaborated with Greek contemporary music composer Georges Aperghis in Paris, collaborations including *Commentaires*, *Zwielicht* and *Paysage sous Surveillance*. Recently he directed for Theatre YBY in Salzburg, BPZoom in Paris, Les Flamiches Noires in Belgium. His *Conference on Laughter* tours the world (Argentina, Israel, France, Holland, Edinburgh Festival, London). Jos is a teacher, director, deviser and consultant with comedy troupes, opera companies, circus schools, international organisations, workshop festivals, dance schools, universities and magicians worldwide and since 2000 he has been a teacher at L'École Jacques Lecoq.

#### Kathryn Hunter

Born in New York, raised as a Londoner, Kathryn read French and Drama at Bristol University and went on to train at RADA with the inspirational Hugh Crutwell. Kathryn played Alan Ayckbourn farces in UK Rep before joining Chattie Salaman in Common Stock and training in Grotowski-based techniques. She then joined Théâtre de Complicité devising *Anything for a Quiet Life* directed by Simon McBurney; *Help I'm Alive*, a Commedia dell'Arte creation; and *Out of a House Walked a Man*, RNT London. Other productions with Complicité include *Foe*, *The Winter's Tale* and Dürrenmatt's *The Visit* playing Clara Zochanassian (Olivier Award Best Actress). Favorite performances include King Lear directed by Helena Kaut Howsen, Richard III at Shakespeare's Globe, Caryl Churchill's *Faraway* directed by Peter Brook at Bouffes du Nord, *The Skriker* at the Royal National Theatre (*Time Out* Best Actress and Olivier nomination), Mr. Ido in *The Bee* directed by Hideki Noda and *Spoonface Steinberg* by Lee Hall directed by Annie Castledine and Marcello Magni, Ambassadors London West End. Kathryn has also directed *Glory of Living* by Rebecca Gilman for the Royal Court; Brecht's *Mr. Punilla and his Man Matti* for the Almeida and Duke of Yorks in the West End; Aristophanes' *The Birds* for the National Theatre with Marcello Magni, aerialists and circus artists; *The Comedy of Errors* with Marcello Magni as the two Dromios; and *Pericles* with Corin Redgrave at Shakespeare's Globe. Films include *Orlando* by Sally Potter, *All or Nothing* by Mike Leigh, *Baby of Macon* by Peter Greenway, Mrs. Figg in *Harry Potter and The Order of the Phoenix*, and Charmian in *Rome* for HBO. Most recently Cleopatra for the RSC and Red Peter in Kafka's *Monkey* for Young Vic, London and Bouffes du Nord, Paris directed by Walter Meierjohann.

#### Marcello Magni

Born in Bergamo, Italy, Marcello studied at DAMS of Bologna University then moved to Paris where he started his theatrical formation. Having graduated from L'École Jacques Lecoq he continued his studies with Pierre Byland, Philippe Gaulier and Monica Pagneux. He is an actor, director, movement director; he has taught at L'École Jacques Lecoq and leads workshops internationally. Co-Founder of Complicité in London in 1983, he worked with the company for 25 years. Collaborator in *A Minute Too Late*; *More Bigger Snacks Now*; *Anything for a Quiet Life*; *Please, Please, Please*; *Help I'm Alive*; *Out of a House Walked a Man*; *The Visit*; *The Winter's Tale*; *Street of Crocodiles*; and *Foe*. He developed a curiosity for the world of masks and Commedia dell'Arte and he performed in plays by Marivaux, Molière and Ruzante. Recently he performed in Italy his solo show *Arlecchino*, originally created in London and performed at BAC in collaboration with Jos Houben and Kathryn Hunter. Marcello met and worked with Mark Rylance in *The Merchant of Venice* at Shakespeare's Globe; with Hideki Noda in *Red Demon*, London & Tokyo; with George Kimoulis as Choreographer for *Antigone* in the ancient theatre of Epidaurus (Greece); with Annie Castledine, Neil Bartlett and Mike Alfreds in *The Game of Love and Chance*, Royal National Theatre; with Helena Kaut Howsen in *King Lear* and *The Rose Tattoo*, Young Vic and Theatre Clwyd; with David Glass in *L'Enfants du Paradis*; with Jack Sheppard in *The Honest Whore* and with Nancy Meckler in *Mother Courage for Shared Experience*; and directed *Pinocchio* at the Lyric Theatre London. Marcello has created and collaborated with Kathryn Hunter in productions of Aristophanes (*The Birds*), Shakespeare (*The Comedy of Errors*), Tennessee Williams (*The Rose Tattoo*) and Bertolt Brecht, and has directed her in Lee Hall's *Spoonface Steinberg*. Films include *Nine* directed by Rob Marshall, *The Adventures of Pinocchio* with Steven Barron, *Maria's Child*, *The Lake* and *Doctor Who*. He has performed in Beckett's "Act Without Words" for Beckett on Film (Channel 4) directed by Enda Hughes. Marcello is the voice of Pingu in the animated series "Pingu." His next project is *Tell Them That I am Young and Beautiful*, an evening of stories from around the world with Kathryn Hunter and writer Gilles Aufrey for Prodo Productions at the Arcola Theatre London.



Marcello Magni, photo by Pascal Victor / ArtComArt



Marcello Magni, photo by Pascal Victor / ArtComArt



Jos Houben, photo by Pascal Victor / ArtComArt

## FURTHER EXPLORATION: RESOURCES

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Founded in 1979 by Jeffrey Horowitz, the mission of Theatre for a New Audience is to develop and vitalize the performance and study of Shakespeare and classic drama. Theatre for a New Audience produces for audiences Off-Broadway and has also toured nationally, internationally and to Broadway. We are guided in our work by five core values: a reverence for language, a spirit of adventure, a commitment to diversity, a dedication to learning, and a spirit of service. These values inform what we do with artists, how we interact with audiences, and how we manage our organization.

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After over 30 years of being an itinerant theatre, Theatre for a New Audience has broken ground on a new home in the BAM Cultural District in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. Scheduled to open in fall 2013, our new home will be a place to gather, learn and explore. In it, we will be able to expand our education and humanities programs to include activities on weekends, after-school and during school vacations for students; as well as lectures, seminars, workshops, and other activities for artists, scholars, adults and families.

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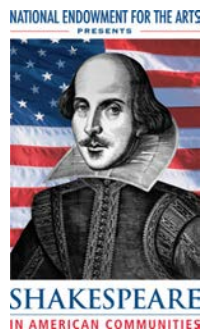
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