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Venice surrenders to Donnellan's frenzied 'Ubu Roi'

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Venice. Special Envoy

Declan Donnellan was 60 in Venice on Sunday and celebrated to the hilt after La Fenice theatre surrendered to his frenzied *Ubu Roi*, yet another masterful lesson of his genius and the talent of his company Cheek by Jowl. This French language production begins with a voyeuristic adolescent poking his video camera in his father's face and ferreting in the nooks and crannies of the family flat.

The famous director transfers the action to a bourgeois dinner, randomly interrupted at the whim of the teenager by hilarious lurches unto the satire on the abuse of power and parody of Macbeth, which Alfred Jarry, pioneer of the theatre of the Absurd, constructed around 1896.

This squeaky clean son imagines his father as a monster butcher urged on by his ambitious wife to seize the throne of Poland, and leaving a trail of corpses and sky high tax demands during his oppressive reign. A burst of green light and the elegant diners metamorphose into Jarry's absurd characters. The actors superbly, hilariously, transform in a flash from banal dinner table chit-chat to comic absurdity. From dressing a salad to assassinating king Wenceslas and seizing his throne.

The ingenious Donnellan uses the tableware to illustrate the feats and the cruelty of the psychotic protagonist. Particularly hilarious is the scream of the off-stage waste disposal unit as it despatches government ministers. Père Ubu showed signs of making off with one of the Venetians in the audience. In October he will try again in Madrid. Amazing!