



UBU ROI

EDUCATION PACK

2013 / 2014

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CHEEK BY JOWL

Cheek by Jowl was established in 1981 by its co-Artistic Directors Declan Donnellan and Nick Ormerod. The company is dedicated to producing fresh and vivid productions that focus on the actor's art, avoiding directorial and design concepts. Cheek by Jowl produces work in English, French and Russian. The company has performed in 330 cities in over 40 countries spanning six continents.

Cheek by Jowl's first production was William Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, presented at the Edinburgh Festival in 1981 and supported by a small Arts Council grant. Before long the company received its first official invitations to perform abroad, taking their productions of *Vanity Fair* and *Pericles* to the Almagro, Valladolid and Jerusalem festivals in 1984. These productions were also subsequently invited to perform in London at the Donmar Warehouse.

For that first London season Cheek by Jowl won the Laurence Olivier Award for Most Promising Newcomer in 1986, with over half of the company's plays receiving Olivier awards. The company grew rapidly throughout the 1980s — creating 18 productions in ten years, touring across five continents and giving over 1,500 performances. By 1990, *The Independent* could say that, "If there is one company to have influenced British theatre in the 1980s, it is Cheek by Jowl."

In 1997, Donnellan and Ormerod directed and designed *The Winter's Tale* for the Maly Drama Theatre of Saint-Petersburg, a production which went on to win Russia's prestigious Golden Mask Award. Throughout the 1990s the Russian Theatre Confederation had regularly invited Cheek by Jowl to Moscow as a part of the Chekhov International Theatre Festival, and this intense relationship with Russia culminated in

1999, when the Chekhov International Theatre Festival, under the leadership of Valery Shadrin, commissioned Donnellan and Ormerod to form their own company of Russian actors in Moscow. This sister company performs in Russia and internationally and its current repertoire includes *Boris Godunov* by Pushkin, *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest* by Shakespeare, and *Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov.

The core of the company's repertoire has always been Shakespeare; by the time of *The Tempest* in 2010 Cheek by Jowl had presented no fewer than 13 of Shakespeare's plays. Another of the company's principles has been to present major works of European drama, both in translation and their original versions. To date Cheek by Jowl has given the British premières of 10 European classics including *The Cid* by Corneille and *Andromache* by Racine, over three hundred years since they were first presented in Paris. John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* is the company's most recent English language production and, following a critically acclaimed international tour which saw the production visit Sydney, Paris, London, New York and Madrid, was remounted in Autumn 2012 for a further UK and International tour.

In addition to their work in English and with the Chekhov International Festival in Russian, in 2007 Peter Brook invited Donnellan and Ormerod to form a group of French actors. The result was a French language production of *Andromaque* by Racine, co-produced with Paris' Bouffes du Nord, which toured throughout the UK and Europe in 2008/2009. Following that production's international success, Cheek by Jowl worked with the same French actors on their new production of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*. This marked the first time that Cheek by Jowl was lead-producer in a foreign language and culture.

ALFRED JARRY

Alfred Jarry was born in Laval, France, in September 1873.

He starts writing very young, and it is during his time at secondary school in Rennes that he finds the inspiration for the character of Ubu, revealed to him in the shape of his Physics teacher, Mr Hébert. Hébert – nicknamed P. H., Father Heb, Eb, Ebé, Ebon, Ebouille – is the hero of numerous tales and adventures told by students at the school and handed down through the years. It is these adventures which, in Jarry's hands, will subsequently form the basis of the first drafts of *Ubu Roi*.

Continuing his studies, Jarry leaves Rennes for Paris where, between 1892-3, he begins to frequent the renowned literary salons of the era. Amongst other literary and artistic figures of the age, he makes the acquaintance of Mallarmé, Rachilde, Léon-Paul Fargue and Marcel Schwob.

Ubu Roi opens at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre (where Jarry works as Secretary to the Director, Lugné-Poe) in December 1896, scheduled for two performances. These are subject to a heated response from audiences, with the first performance having to be interrupted as a result of disruption, as well as a source of huge debate in the press afterwards. Barring a few prominent positive reviews, notably from Mallarmé and the eminent journalist Catulle Mendès, (see p.) critical responses are largely negative.

Jarry continues to write and publish a variety of texts, notably as a contributor to literary reviews such as the *Mercure de France*, the *Revue Blanche* and *La Plume*. Over the years Ubu becomes a recurring feature in his writing with the composition of the plays *Ubu enchaîné*, (Ubu in Chains) and *Ubu cocu*, (Ubu Cuckolded) in addition to the *Almanachs du père Ubu* (The Almanachs of Father Ubu), which will ultimately form the Ubu cycle.

Yet, as he identifies more and more with his own creation Jarry's hedonistic lifestyle begins to get the better of him, and he gradually sinks further and further into destitution. Beset by ill-health and financial difficulties, he dies of tuberculosis on 1 November 1907, aged only 34.

JARRY & FIN-DE-SIÈCLE SOCIETY

Jarry's *Ubu Roi* appeared during the Third Republic in France, (1870-1914) in a society still heavily preoccupied by the social and economic changes precipitated by industrialisation and the political upheavals of the century. This period, comprising the latter third of the 1800s and loosely referred to as the *fin-de-siècle*, marked not only the slow dissemination of new artistic ideas in France, largely grouped around figures such as Stephane Mallarmé and the Symbolist movement, but also the consolidation of the *bourgeoisie*: a class whose ideologies, cultural practices and relationships were shaped in response to the events of the century coming to its close.

Following the fall of Napoleon III and the end of the Second Empire, (1852-1870) the advent of the Third Republic provided a perfect opportunity for an economically shrewd, aspirational *bourgeois* stratum to expand its wealth and affirm its prominence within — and value to — French society; industrialists, merchants, bankers and professional men, the *bourgeois* were not only actively involved in trade and business, they also commanded higher civil service positions and participated



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in government. The appointment of Jules Ferry as Minister of Education in 1879 is a good example. Himself a product of a bourgeois family, Ferry's laws on free, mandatory and secular public education cemented the ideas of a new Republic, democratic and free of religion. In addition to other initiatives such as the Law on the Freedom of the Press of 1881, which liberalised the media and sought to promote free public discussion by sweeping away a swathe of earlier statutes, the political imperatives of the era created a climate in which the bourgeoisie could flourish and increase its power base.

Sociocultural readings of the bourgeoisie are further elucidated by gender relations within this social group. In the first instance, the assimilation of bourgeois class status was distinguished by the movement of women out of the family business and into the home: women were integral to maintaining the standing of the domestic sphere, notably by establishing a moral 'centre' for the family within a suitable home, alongside the necessary material comforts. Subscribing to a domestic ideology which emphasized the importance of harmonious familial relations, a moral private life, and the celebration of the home as a haven from the rational but heartless world of the market, the bourgeois had a profound need for order; having lived through the unrest of the years between 1852-1870, they were wary of that which might threaten social peace or interfere with their right to property, business and trade.

Into this historical moment Alfred Jarry was born, in 1873.



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UBU'S FIRST PERFORMANCE: THÉÂTRE DE L'OEUVRE, PARIS, 8 DECEMBER 1896

Extract 1

After Us The Savage God

The Irish poet W.B. Yeats was in attendance at the first performance of Ubu Roi on 8 December 1896. The following is an extract from his diaries:

"I go to the first performance of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, at the Théâtre de L'Oeuvre [...]. The audience shake their fists at one another, and the Rhymer whispers to me, 'There are often duels after these performances', and he explains to me what is happening on the stage. The players are supposed to be dolls, toys, marionettes, and now they are all hopping like wooden frogs, and I can see for myself that the chief personage, who is some kind of King, carries for sceptre a brush of the kind that we use to clean a closet. Feeling bound to support the most spirited party, we have shouted for the play, but that night at the Hotel Corneille I am very sad, for comedy, objectivity, has displayed its growing power once more. I say: 'After Stéphané Mallarmé, after Paul Verlaine, after Gustave Moreau, after Puvis de Chavannes, after our own verse, after all our subtle colour and nervous rhythm, after the faint mixed tints of Conder, what more is possible? After us the Savage God.'

Extract 2

From **Alfred Jarry**, by **Jill Fell**, Associate Research Fellow at the Department of European Cultures and Languages, Birkbeck, University of London:

'Despite the fact that Yeats joined the *claque* that was shouting for the play, he went back to his hotel with a feeling of deep sadness, realizing that he had witnessed the end of what he perceived as his own artistic era, one of refined delicacy, and the beginning of a new, more savage one [...]

After Jarry's introductory speech [...] the next word the audience heard, as Gémier took centre stage was the eagerly awaited '*merdre!*' [...] None the less, it was a fiction [...] that 'the Word' sparked off a riot among the audience. [...] *Ubu Roi* had been in print for six months and the audience knew what to expect. [...] According to the journalist Georges Rémond, Jarry's plan had been to provoke a more dramatic theatrical scandal than those of *Phèdre* and *Hernani*. His personal *claque* were not his literary friends, but drinking companions from his local restaurant, Chez Ernest. They had been briefed to start a disturbance, whatever happened. On the one hand they were to counter applause with furious shouts, but in the case of boos and whistles, to utter ecstatic cries of delight. [...] According to Rémond, Jarry did not intend the play to reach its conclusion. The audience itself was to provide the theatrical event. Jarry's disdain for flattery and praise may have been the reason why he had to be prompted to write to thank the eminent journalist, Catulle Mendès, for his wise analysis of Jarry's achievement in creating the Ubu phenomenon:

"A new type has been put before us, created by the extravagant and brutal imagination of a man who is a sort of child.

Père Ubu exists...

You will not be able to get rid of him; he will haunt you and perpetually force you to remember not only that he passed this way, but that he has arrived and is here..."

Jarry had received a similar accolade from Mallarmé, thanking [him] for his presentation copy of *Ubu Roi*, earlier that year:

“With the skill of a sure and sober dramatic sculptor, my dear friend, and with a rare and durable clay upon your fingers, you have set a prodigious figure on his feet, together with his troop.

He enters the repertoire of high taste and haunts me; thank you.”



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UBU ROI | COMPANY



Camille Cayol
Mère Ubu



Christophe Grégoire
Père Ubu



Vincent de Bouard
Le Roi



Xavier Boiffier
Bordure



Sylvain Levitte
Bougrelas/The Son



Cécile Leterme
La Reine



UBU ROI

Produced by Cheek by Jowl in a co-production with the Barbican, London, Les Géméaux/Sceaux/Scène Nationale and La Comédie de Béthune-Centre Dramatique National du Nord-Pas-de-Calais

CREATIVE TEAM

DIRECTOR

Declan Donnellan

DESIGNER

Nick Ormerod

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Michelangelo Marchese

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Pascal Noel

COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

Davy Sladek

with additional music by Paddy Cuneen

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Bertrand Lesca

VOICE COACH

Valérie Bezançon

FIGHT DIRECTOR

François Rostain

TECHNICAL STAGE MANAGER

Dougie Wilson

COSTUME SUPERVISOR

Angie Burns

TECHNICAL STAGE MANAGER

Manuel Vidal

LIGHTING

Vincent Gabriel

SOUND

Clémentine Bergel

AUDIOVISUAL

Benoit Simon and Quentin Vigier

WARDROBE

Marina Aguilar

CONSULTANT PRODUCER

Béatrice Catry

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Edward Fortes

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