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Photos

By Eugene Ionesco
Directed by Niall Henry

**THE BALD
SOPRANO**

Media Release

Blue Raincoat Theatre Company present
The Bald Soprano by Eugene Ionesco

Described variously as a hair-raising theatrical thrill, and excellent, Blue Raincoat Theatre Company's production of Ionesco's classic absurd drama illuminates the plays themes with intelligence and wit. In a stylish production, six characters explore the banality of language, politeness and social customs as discovered by the then 40-year-old Ionesco as he began to learn English from a book.

As he repeated to memory the lines from his English primer Ionesco became acutely aware of the absurdity of conversational language use. This became the basis on which he began to examine the inanity of conversation, where meaningful substance is replaced by hollow platitude, where communication itself is the greatest barrier to understanding.

Premiered in Paris in 1950 The Bald Soprano is largely credited with having inaugurated the Theatre of The Absurd, a form in which many playwrights, amongst them Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter, were to forge their reputations.

"Illustrates the importance of originality and spontaneity in theatrical performance" - The Irish Times

"Wildly funny" -The Sunday Independent

Media Review

The Daily Mail March 14th 2008 Review: John McKeown
The Bald Soprano by Blue Raincoat Theatre Company

The first of Romano-French playwright Eugene Ionesco's "anti-plays" is an absurdist classic and the absurdities it exposes are ones we are all familiar with. Ionesco said he was inspired by the banal clichés and truisms of Mr and Mrs Smith and their guests, Mr and Mr Martin, characters illustrating dialogue in the textbook he was using to learn English.

The resulting parody of English suburban life, with its snippets of monstrously inane conversation traded between robotically self-absorbed couples who are gloriously ignorant of their own pettiness, is recognisable from the last half century of British TV comedy.

Like Beckett and Pinter, Ionesco pulls the rug of dramatic plot, narrative, and structure from beneath the audience's feet, leaving an extreme form of situation comedy, which, funny though it can be, is also full of uncomfortable undertones.

Director Niall Henry of Blue Raincoat Theatre Company takes the right approach: the actors play their parts not with a nod and wink and a knowing awareness of the manners and mores they are sending up, but as straight, as if they were performing a serious, 'normal' drama.

The Martins turn up as unexpected guests at the Smith's home, though Mr Smith is still outraged by their unpunctuality. The two couples cling to their middle-class dignity despite the increasingly bizarre parlour games they seem programmed to indulge in.

The four - Ciaran McCauley and Sandra O Malley play the Smiths, and John Carty and Ruth Lehane play the Martins - are at continual cross-purposes, fuelled by wildly inappropriate remarks and responses and by rows about trivia conducted with ferocious logic.

The fire chief (Patrick Curley) who calls in hopes of a fire to put out, manages to cool things down a little but when he recognises the Smith's maid is an old flame, his ungentle manly ardour sends everything into its final crazy spiral.

The comic mileage extracted from the play's single hour is amazing. At least five minutes are dedicated to a silence that grows out of one of Mrs Smith's sulks, only interrupted by Mrs Martin's all-purpose conversation starter: 'we all have colds.' Mr Smith retorts that it isn't chilly, and Mrs Smith, offers the unrelated but crushing: 'he's wet his pants.'

The Martin's polite amazement to learn, as they quiz each other on arrival, that they not only come from the same town, but live in the same house, share identical beds with a green eiderdown, have a daughter with one red eye and one white, and therefore must be married, is done to perfection.

However, as the maid (Kellie Hughes) informs us after this dizzyingly silly mutual interrogation, they've leapt to the wrong conclusion: Mr Martin's daughter has her red eye on the left, Mrs Martin's on the right, so they are not who they think they are.

It is in the maid's recital of her 'Fire Poem' that Ionesco's deeper concern with the inadequacy of language and our inability to communicate suddenly flames through the comic surface.

Hughe's maniacal whirling around the stage, making a direct and ardent appeal to us to cast off convention and burn with her, is a strange, thrilling, transcendent moment in which Ionesco's anti-realist vision of theatre is beautifully realised.

Media Review

The Sunday Times March 23rd 2008 Review: Declan Burke
The Bald Soprano by Blue Raincoat Theatre Company

On the surface, Eugene Ionesco's first play is an affectionate parody of English suburbia, in which Mr and Mrs Smith (Ciaran McCauley and Sandra O Malley) entertain their friends Mr and Mrs Martin (John Carty and Ruth Lehane), their polite conversation disturbed by the intrusions of the maid (Kellie Hughes) and the fire chief (Patrick Curley), who may or may not be secret lovers. As the talk grows more surreal, however, it becomes clear that this is a satire on the effectiveness of language as a communication tool. The cast treads a fine line between their archly ironic roles of deadpan and delivery. Niall Henry's direction mirrors Ionesco's tone, formal but playful, precisely executed but absurd. If communication and meaning are irreconcilable forces, this beautifully detailed exploration of pointless endeavour represents a satisfactory truce.



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