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Written by Eugene Ionesco

Directed by Niall Henry

# THE CHAIRS

# Media Release

Blue Raincoat Theatre Company present Eugene Ionesco's masterpiece

The Chairs

In a lighthouse on the edge of civilisation an old man and an old woman are waiting.

They await the arrival of the town's leading figures, the Mayor, the Blacksmith, the Colonel etc. because tonight, after a life of underachievement the old man has finally decided (with the help of the town orator whom he has employed to speak for him) to tell all. Who he really is, what life really means and what he should really have become.

Drawing inspiration from the traditions of verbal nonsense and absurd chaos seen in the early sound films of Laurel & Hardy and The Marx Brothers Ionesco's The Chairs is a wonderful comedy and more besides. It is a riveting interrogation of life and living that fuses elements of movement, light, sound and language to communicate its atmosphere. The Chairs is a fast moving, tragic farce that becomes increasingly funny as the pace quickens and more and more guests arrive to hear the old man's message.

His message will save humanity. What will his message be?

*“Excellent performances.....outstanding example of absurdist theatre”*

The Irish Times

*“Blue Raincoat’s performance of The Chairs is a thumpingly good one”*

The Sunday Independent

# Media Release

Blue Raincoat Theatre Company takes top international festival prize

Sligo based Blue Raincoat Theatre Company have taken the highest award-for best performance- at the International FestCo festival in Bucharest. The Company had performed two productions-The Bald Soprano and The Chairs- by Romanian born Eugene Ionesco as part of the Festival programme in April before going on to perform in three other cities in neighbouring Bulgaria. Both performances took place at Teatrul De Comedie in Bucharest and the award was given in respect of the two plays. The accolade is a unique honour for an Irish company. Blue Raincoat was the first Irish company invited to participate in the prestigious event. Currently completing a nationwide tour of The Third Policeman, the Company was unable to attend the awards ceremony and Ruth Parkin of the Irish Embassy in Romania accepted the award on the Company's behalf at the ceremony that took place last Saturday evening.

# Media Release

Standing ovations for Blue Raincoat Theatre Company

Blue Raincoat Theatre Company's current tour of Romania and Bulgaria has cemented their reputation as one of Ireland's most exciting theatre producers. Showing their productions of Eugene Ionesco's *The Chairs* and *The Bald Soprano* for the first time in Europe, at the Fest Co Festival in Bucharest, in Ruse and Pleven, the Company concluded their tour with performances at the Salza i Smiah Theatre in Sofia where *The Chairs* played on Saturday the 12th April and *The Bald Soprano* on Sunday the 13th.

Thus far, Blue Raincoat has played to over 1500 people in 4 performances and has received standing ovations every night from an appreciative public. The playwright Eugene Ionesco is revered in his native Romania and it is a notable achievement for a non - Romanian theatre company to receive such a positive reaction to productions of his work in English.

On their return from Europe, Blue Raincoat begins rehearsals for the forthcoming national tour of Flann O' Brien's *The Third Policeman*. The play, which was a sell out success in Sligo last year, will tour to Omagh, Waterford, Ennis, Longford, Cork and Portlaoise before returning to Sligo for a four night run at The Hawks Well Theatre from May 28th to 31st. Full details on this and on Blue Raincoat Theatre Company are available at [www.blueraincoat.com](http://www.blueraincoat.com)

# Media Review

The Irish Times, October 19th 2006 Review: Patrick Lonergan  
The Chairs by Blue Raincoat Theatre Company

Absurdist plays revel in the discordant and the illogical-and provoke both laughter and bewilderment often simultaneously. But, at its best, the theatre of the absurd also presents an entirely serious and easily understood idea: that life is chaotic, confusing, often ridiculous. This new Blue Raincoat production of Eugene Ionesco's 1952 absurdist classic is an outstanding example of this approach.

Each of the play's elements has its own logic but, when added together, they contradict each other, undermining the audience's sympathies and expectations. In other productions, this can result in superficiality: actors are sometimes tempted to over-play Ionesco's humour, while directors can mistakenly assume that the apparent chaos of the action means that the script itself shouldn't be taken too seriously.

In contrast, Niall Henry's production succeeds primarily because of his team's fidelity to and understanding of, the original text. Jamie Vartan's set follows Ionesco's instructions precisely; presenting a large semi-circular room with several doors in the walls, and two chairs centre-stage. Mikel Murfi, Ruth Lehane and Ciaran McCauley show a detailed awareness of both the humour and the subtlety of the script, delivering excellent performances that shift with an unruly zest from physical comedy to philosophical depth.

The willingness of Murfi and Lehane to give full expression to their characters affection for each other gives the play pathos, but they also trust their roles enough to avoid sentimentality. Lighting by Michael Cummins assists this process, discretely shifting audience's attention around the stage to create a haunting atmosphere.

Chair after chair is added as the action progresses, each addition signalling a new approach to narration and stagecraft until we reach a conclusion that is, perhaps paradoxically, both anti-climatic and cathartic. We're left with a vision of humanity that emphasises the absurdity of existence but this production brilliantly affirms other essential aspects of our lives: compassion, human dignity and, most surprisingly, love.

# Media Review

Sunday Independent October 15th 2006 Review: Emer O'Kelly  
The Chairs by Blue Raincoat Theatre Company

Inspired craziness in a Blue Raincoat triumph

On of the last public statements from Eugene Ionesco, the great Absurdist, was typically waspish and detached. The Czech president, Vaclav Havel, was visiting Paris in 1990 to great acclaim from the liberal left. Ionesco pointed out that they were the very people who had previously savaged Havel's dissident plays as giving aid to the right wing in his own country under Communism. For Ionesco, fascist intolerance was as unacceptable from the left as it was from the right.

Blue Raincoat's production of The Chairs in Sligo is thumpingly good one, keeping the sense of ironic isolation that Ionesco would have wished, while involving the audience in their own speculation as to the realities or otherwise of what they are seeing on stage.

An old couple, married for 75 years, wait in an isolated house on an equally isolated island. The man has never achieved his potential, but is soothed by his wife; and now he is about to give his earth-moving message to an invited audience of dignitaries.

These latter arrive in dribs and drabs, and then in a rush but we never see them. Instead, the old woman rushes around arranging ever-increasing numbers of chairs while her husband greets the guests, the last of whom is the Emperor.

Insecurity about his abilities has led the old man to hire an orator to deliver his message, and the couple becomes increasingly despairing and agitated as they wait for him in the milling crowd, finally agreeing across their heads to make the final gesture of suicide from the windows. When the orator finally speaks, he is a deaf mute close to idiocy who can only scrawl meaningless phrases on the wall.

Niall Henry's direction of the piece in Jamie Vartan's design is terrific, preserving the crazy intensity while leaving open the possibility that we are witnessing real craziness, and that we are inside the senile minds of the old couple rather than in their many doored refuge (prison?). The timing is excellent, as silences seep uneasily across the stage and the baleful presence of the orator is reduced to inane babbling. Mikel Murfi and Ruth Lehane do a splendid job (particularly Murphy) as the couple, and Ciaran McCauley is the Orator.

This one is a real success for Blue Raincoat.



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