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Théâtre de la Pire Espèce: Ubu on the Table

in Reviews | by Rebecca JS Nice | No Comments

Tags: Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2016

Adapted and performed by Olivier Ducas and Francis Monty (Théâtre de la Pire Espèce), *Ubu on the Table* recreates Alfred Jarry's 19th century farce, *Ubu Roi* with puppetry, clowning and chaotic kitchen utensils. Two messy prop tables that look like something from *Kitchen Nightmares* frame a central table covered in a black table cloth. At each side, two standing lamps with smaller bulbs

attached in a ramshackle handmade style focus on the empty table where Ducas and Monty welcome us into the space. They bicker over the angle of the light, warn us about emergency exits and select an audience member in the front row to watch extra carefully without divulging what is going to happen to her during the performance. They do this with an excited tattle and drawn-out speech where they undermine each other, finish each other's sentences or create sound effects that have the audience warmed and giggling before the show has even started.

There is a good mash-up of love, sauciness and gruesome battles in the narrative which is told using everyday kitchen items and utensils who take their turn to be paraded along the table top in true royal fashion. The pair waste no time in getting down to business as a glass dressing jar with a wide bottom and narrow top, Ubu, is kissed frantically until he literally pops his cork by a mop-like washing up brush (his wife) rendering this a strictly adult show. There is something slightly weird but truly wonderful in watching kitchen items do the dirty with each other in the stylised fashion that Ducas and Monty create with heavy rumbling accents and silly noises.

This adaptation of *Ubu Roi* (like Jarry's original) sets the story in Poland. Power, greed and evil actions are satirised, highlighting the absurdity of Machiavellian style rule often aspired to by those in power. The narrative follows a typical journey of usurpation, double-crossing and fighting to maintain power with a healthy dollop of sexual antics in the mix. The glass dressing jar, Ubu, overthrows the King of Poland, played by a large teapot, and his son, the mini teapot, seeks vengeance and declares war. Captain Bordure, the rigid hammer, is an evil Duke who eventually rebels against King Ubu by having raunchy antics with his washing-up-brush wife and going to war with an army of forks. The objects are plain and undecorated except for one – the protagonist Ubu, who has eyes and a coloured handle for a nose. The inanimate objects are unobtrusive and only become interesting in the hands of Ducas and Monty who embody each character from head to toe and whose focus never once flutters away from the speaking object and his respective human. This is a style of puppetry where the expression and communication is centered around the puppeteer, both man and object become one; however rather than the human fading into the background these two do quite the opposite. They create a piece on three planes: their whooshing sound effects in the background, their speech and embodiment in the position of particular characters in the mid-plane, and their manipulation of the objects in the foreground. This makes the piece fast moving, full of content and constantly engaging.

In a play on the nickname taken from the original title, King Turd, this adaptation takes poo references to the extreme, using them as a metaphor for the treatment of society and as literal events in the narrative. When a scene is created in the throne room, a red woollen scarf rolls out and trumpet introductory noises, mimicking those used to announce entry to a great hall, are repeated between sentences at top speed. This creates the most vivid of scenes with minimum objects and decorations. The same scene-setting reoccurs for King Ubu with toilet paper rolled out in place of a red carpet in a play on the throne room. Constipation, diarrhoea and general guttural functions are a prominent theme in the work taking a large role in the battle of loaves with cutlery sticking out of them to help defend his rule.

Once in power, the mop wife spends all of Ubu's money so they need to kill the Nobles to gain their wealth. A brain-zapping machine flies in for a wonderful scene where Noble spoons are catapulted from the ruler towards the quivering audience member selected at the start of the show. The conversations, deliberations and tactics used but each silver spoon Noble before he is executed are hilarious, the suicide jumps are ridiculously dramatic, as is every entry and exit of a character. Corkscrews helicopter in and the Duke gallops, as does his human counterpart, in a rigid posture drawn from the characteristic of the hammer.

When Ubu sends a wooden toy pepperpot to spy on the Duke, a tabletop tango emerges between the Duke hammer and The Queen washing-up-brush who are sensual, sexy and downright dirty with each other, mirrored by the wooden spy who is following their every move. The recounting of the events to the King Ubu, who requires a full demonstration from the pepper pot spy, are the icing in the cake for this scene.

The joy and sophistication of this piece lies in the thorough embodiment and expression of so many different characters by Ducas and Monty who take on board the object's features to create their portrayal. The adaptation and imaginative recreation of characters and the satirical nature of the play that appeals to a contemporary audience make the work more poignant, particularly as it is performed in several languages across several countries. Most of all, I laughed from beginning to end at the endearing teapots and animated, charismatic performers.

J'aime 17

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Rebecca JS Nice

Rebecca worked as a dance teacher, lecturer and choreographer for eight years specialising in tap and jazz. She has a background in Art History and is currently training further in medieval history and contemporary choreography with a particular interest in live art. At the early stage of her dance writing career, Rebecca reviews and analyses theatre and dance performance and is working on a papers for publication.

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EDINBURGH FESTIVALS Magazine



Ubu on the Table

August 29th, 2016 | by lidia



FRINGE

Rating: ★★★★★

Ubu on the Table is an entertaining and thrilling hour of puppetry and physical theatre. As a theatrical take on Alfred Jarry's late nineteenth century tragedy, it's holds Shakespearean influences and balances out doom with perfectly timed humour.

The performers keep the audience gripped, conveying the story with moments of both intensity and humour with just a cast of household items for props. Complex themes and jokes are communicated with ease, and the whole performance amplified by the excellent use of set and lighting to communicate a handmade feel.

Ubu on the Table is a show that's full of energy, and remains gripping and humorous throughout. From the use of the props to the hand painted placards, this performance has a rustic charm well worth witnessing.

Words: Katie Mckenzie

Ubu on the Table, Summerhall, Aug 28, 2.35pm



4 stars Fringe Review Summerhall Theatre Ubu on the Table

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THE LIST

Ubu on the Table ●●●●●

Jarry's anarchic classic given the puppet treatment

- **Source:** The List <https://edinburghfestival.list.co.uk/article/83327-ubu-on-the-table/>
- **Date:** 12 August 2016 (updated 24 Aug 2016)
- **Written by:** [Adam Bloodworth](#)



Having performed *Ubu on the Table* in French and Spanish over 800 times around the world, theatre company La Pire Espèce made an English adaptation their next challenge. The play is a twist on Alfred Jarry's *Ubu roi*, an outrageous parody of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The play charts Pere Ubu's murder of the King of Poland, and the subsequent warfare and political chaos. The play arguably gave birth to modernism, and its zany aesthetic acted as a precursor to surrealist theatre. La Pire Espèce reimagine Ubu by performing the show with puppets around a small table – and kitchen utensils are the leading actors.

Confused? *Ubu on the Table* is a deft and high-octane puppet show. The props, or cast, are well chosen: an upturned teapot is particularly effective as the murdered King. It's full of Fringe frivolity, descending into the spectacle of two men flinging lumps of baguette around, conveying warfare with childlike zeal. Unfortunately, the work put in by the two puppeteers often feels unequal to the laughs returned. It's an energetic show, with clever puppeteering, but the tray of foodie ammunition stage left is a foreshadowing too far and the food fight finale becomes overlong.

Summerhall, until 28 Aug (not 15, 23), 2.35pm, £12 (£10).

Ubu on the Table

★★★★

THEATRE REVIEW

By **Billy Barrett**

PUBLISHED 10 AUGUST 2016

Ubu Roi, Alfred Jarry's once notoriously obscene, Shakespearean satire of power and greed, is given an imaginative puppet staging in this small-scale epic. Théâtre de la Pire Espèce cast kitchen utensils and condiments as kings, queens and European armies, using a simple black tabletop as the battleground for tomato-spattered warfare.



It's these absurd limits that the Canadian company sets on the show—how can a baguette with forks stuck in it stand in for the entire Polish army?—that allows them to get a handle on the play's own limitless absurdity, which often seems to require a frame of sorts to truly work.

There are definite echoes of Forced Entertainment's recent *Complete Works: Table Top Shakespeare*, in which the experimental performers staged 36 of the Bard's works with common household items, drawing attention to the imaginative act of theatre. There's a similar strategy at play here, though with more fun and showmanship. As an audience, we have to work to imaginatively co-create the drama, but it's the bantering relationship between the two puppetmasters—flinging insults at each other as well as cutlery—that really hooks us into the game.

Jarry's provocative depravity is joyfully mined for its slapstick, gross-out potential as the table in question becomes more and more stained. But uproariously silly and full of ingenious quirks as it is, *Ubu on the Table* is perhaps a little too light-hearted for the politics of Jarry's play to shine through, and its darker side is glossed over in all the food-fight frivolity.



THE SCOTSMAN

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER

Theatre review: Ubu On The Table

MARK FISHER

Wednesday 24 August 2016

Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi is a juvenile parody of Macbeth-style murderous excess.

Star rating: ***

Venue: Summerhall (Venue 26)

It throws a raw, rude and ribald two fingers at the world with a cartoonish swagger. All the more fitting, then, that the ascent to power of the tyrannical Ubu should be presented with brash, bumptious humour and staged on a table top with the principal characters represented by household implements – objects not known for their nuanced characterisation.

With a mixture of casual banter and precise manipulation, Étienne Blanchette and Mathieu Gosselin of Montreal's Théâtre de la Pire Espèce give a surprising humanity to a series of inanimate objects. Ubu is a bottle of salad dressing, his wife is a washing-up brush, Captain Bordure is a hammer and the forces of opposition are inverted teapots, their lids forming gaping smiles.

It could be ruder: apart from an early scene of cork-related fellatio, it is family-friendly stuff that has more volume than vulgarity. But it fulfils the promise of its own absurd logic as it builds to an over-the-top battle scene involving a fusillade of grape bullets and tomato bombs raining down on a ramshackle army of toothbrushes and rusty pizza cutters.

Until 28 August. Today 2:35pm.

Source: <http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/culture/theatre/theatre-review-ubu-on-the-table-1-4211270>