

JANE HOUSE PRODUCTIONS & ISTITUTO ITALIANO DI CULTURA, NY
CONTINUING EDUCATION & PUBLIC PROGRAMS
MARTIN E. SEGAL THEATRE CENTER
THE GRADUATE CENTER, CUNY

present

a stage reading of

Luigi Pirandello's
Tonight We Improvise
(Questa sera si recita a soggetto, 1929)

Director

Elfin Frederick Vogel

Music Director and Composer

Darryl Curry

Produced by

Jane E. House

Translators

J. Douglas Campbell and Leonard G. Sbrocchi

Assistant Director/Dramaturg

Giuseppe Solinas

Technical Director

Jeremiah Greenblatt

Casting Assistance

Tom Rowan

Marcy Arlin, Immigrants' Theatre Project

6:00 p.m., Monday, March 1, 2004, New York City

Harold M. Proshansky Auditorium

The Graduate Center, 365 Fifth Avenue (34 St)

Cosponsors:

Ph.D. Program in Theatre, The Graduate Center, CUNY

Pirandello Society of America

Running time, approximately 2 hours

Musical Pieces

Act 2

La Labbra (The Lips)words, Abbé G. Meli; musical setting, Darryl Curry

Act 3

Graceful Ghost (Rag)William Bolcom

Il Trovatore – excerpts Giuseppe Verdi

“Ah! Che la morte ognora”; “Tacea la notte placida”; “Stride la vampa”

“Chi del gitano i giorni abbellà?”; “Deserto sulla terra”

Cast

Dr. HinkfussBrian O'Connor*

Leading Actor/Rico VerriBrian Voelcker*

Old Comic Actor/Signor La Croce or Sampognetta.....Bill Galarno*

Character Actress/ Signora La CroceDonna Elliott*

Leading Actress/Mommina La CroceDebra Vogel

Actress/Totina La Croce Kathryn Clark Gray*

Actress/Dorina La Croce Carolina McNeely

Actress/Nene La Croce Meg Araneo

Actor/Pomarici, air force officer..... Christopher Pollard Meyer*

Actor/Sarelli, air force officer..... Vaneik Echeverria*

Actor/Nardi, air force officerAlfredo Narciso

Actor/Pometti, air force officer Peter Postiglione*

Actor/Mangini, air force officerMark Thornton*

Actor/first customer in cabaret Nick Raio*

Actor/second customer in cabaret..... Carmine Raspaolo*

Actress/singer in cabaret Emelise Aleandri*

other characters

Michael Bettencourt, Alene Kristal, Nick Raio,*

Carmine Raspaolo,* Jason Visel tear

*Member of Actors' Equity Association

Director's Note

Pirandello wrote three plays that have the stage as the place of action: *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *Each in His Own Way* and *Tonight We Improvise*. In each of these plays he examines a different aspect of the creative forces at work on stage. In *Six Characters*, he looks at the discrepancy between the writer's creation, the characters, and their realization on stage by the actors; in *Each in His Own Way* he deals with the relationship of artistic creation to real life; and in *Tonight We Improvise* he questions the source of creation on stage. Each of these plays asks us to suspend disbelief and accept what we see as, at least in part, the result of spontaneous utterances rather than the result of the author's imagination. Each of the three plays reflects Pirandello's artistic philosophy in general and his ideas about the theatre and its creators—actors, writers, directors and designers—in particular.

In *Tonight We Improvise*, actors, audience, and directorial invention battle for dominance of the proceedings. Pirandello began his theatrical career with a disdain for the conventions of the theatrical life that dominated the Italian scene. Companies then were typically led by actor-managers in a system where actors held fixed positions as “leading actor,” “leading actress,” “character actor” etc. During the years when he directed his own company, Pirandello learned to respect the craft of the actor and the director as creative forces, and became convinced that the writer's work, important as it is as the starting point to the work's life on stage, is secondary to the actor's and director's work once a play is to be realized on stage. His suggestion that the dialogue of this play is an “improvisation” acknowledges this hierarchy. But this reordering of priorities has not fully solved the question of artistic control on stage. Quite to the contrary, it has complicated it, because instead of the single vision of the playwright it is now a group of people who will either manage to enchant the audience, or leave it confused, dissatisfied, and angry. And Pirandello gives the audience as well a vocal role, to suggest that it too, in its willingness or refusal to participate, plays an active part in the success of a production.

Attending a staged reading is a bit like going to a restaurant, ordering from a fascinating menu, and then, instead of being served a full meal, having the chef come out to recite his recipes and narrate his methods of cooking. Mouth-watering perhaps, but never as filling as the full meal. For this presentation of *Tonight We Improvise* we have edited the text and Pirandello's copious stage directions to present as actively as possible the actions and dialogue, while omitting those elements that could only be shown in a fully realized production that would reflect Pirandello's ideas about the stage as a creatively shaped locale.

—Elfin Frederick Vogel

Some Production History

The world premiere of *Tonight We Improvise* (*Questa sera si recita a soggetto*), in a translation by Harry Kahn entitled *Heute Abend Wird aus dem Stegreif*, took place in the Neue Schauspielschauspielhaus, Königsberg, Germany on January 25, 1930. Directed by Hans Carl Müller, with sets by Friedrich Kalbfuss, the premiere received favorable notices and Pirandello praised it for being “completely alive, wonderfully alive.” A Berlin production directed by expressionist Gustav Hartung opened four months later. Pirandello found it “pretentious and pedantic.” “My play,” he wrote, “is like a Tiepolo fresco, alive, as though moved by the wind, capricious. The director took up a tiny brush, instead... Breadth, imagination, are missing.” The first Italian performance, directed by Guido Salvini, took place at Teatro di Torino, Torino, on April 14, 1930. The Paris opening came five years later, at Théâtre des Mathurins, on January 17, 1935, in a translation by Benjamin Crémieux entitled *Ce soir on improvise*. Georges Pitoëff directed and played Hinkfuss and Ludmilla Pitoëff was Mommina.

On February 10, 1955, a young and idealistic theatre group, The Living Theatre Studio, opened the play in NYC in a translation by Claude Fredericks. Directed by Julian Beck, this 1955 production featured Beck as Hinkfuss, Richard Edelman as Rico Verri, Judith Malina as Mommina, and George Furth as Sarelli. Four years later, on November 6, 1959, the group, renamed The Living Theatre, revived the production. Beck again directed, he and Malina repeated their roles, Joseph Chaikin was Mangini, and Remy Charlip choreographed. The play ran in repertory with *The Connection*.

Other noteworthy productions include the Rideau Vert, Montreal in 1968, directed by Guy Hoffman; Luigi Squarzina's 1972 presentation at Teatro Stabile of Genoa; a production by Peter Coe at Chichester in 1974, which featured Keith Michell as Hinkfuss and Keith Baxter as Rico Verri; and a 1987 American Repertory Theatre production, for which the director Robert Brustein commissioned Frederick Wiseman to film videos of the action which were then projected on a large screen hanging above the stage.

—Jane House and Giuseppe Solinas

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE ARTISTIC TEAM

Luigi Pirandello (Playwright) was born in Il Caos, Sicily in 1867. He was a poet, a writer of short stories and novels, an essayist, and a prolific playwright. His plays were first produced in 1910, but he only began concentrating on being a playwright in 1916, and over the next eight years he wrote 28 plays. In 1925 he and a group of friends formed the Teatro d'Arte in Rome where they introduced 9 foreign plays, staged 15 world premieres, and presented many of Pirandello's works. In 1934 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Among his best known plays are the theatre-within-theatre trilogy, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *Each in His Own Way* and *Tonight We Improvise*; and *Enrico IV*; *Right You Are (If You Think You Are)*; *The Rules of the Game*; *To Clothe the Naked*; and the unfinished *The Mountain Giants*. He died in 1936.

Elfin Frederick Vogel (Director) has directed over thirty productions in NYC and regional theatres, among them: *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* by Anton Chekhov, *Measure for Measure*, *Othello*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *A Winter's Tale* by Shakespeare, *Rameau's Nephew* by Dennis Diderot, adapted by Michael Feingold, *The Real Thing* by Tom Stoppard, *Reckless Abandon* and *Moral and Political Lessons on 'Wyoming'* by Vincent Sessa and *Porch* and *Attic* by Keller Easterling. His production of Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* won the 'Best Ensemble Production' Award in Memphis in 1991. He has directed a number of cabaret shows, including *Push my Buttons* by Rob LaRocco and Sam Austin, *Love Addiction and Other Affairs of the Heart*, *A Valentine's Day Celebration* and *Are We Having Any Fun*. He also directed the operas *Arms Akimbo* and *Der Schauspieldirektor* and the musicals *Brigadoon* and *The Little Prince*.

Darryl Curry (Music Director/Composer) is a composer, arranger, performer, and musical director whose work ranges from jazz to musical theater to sacred music. Mr. Curry has written the musicals *The Elephant Piece*, *Quitters*, *George Q* and *Dorian Gray* as well as incidental music for the 1999 Twentieth Anniversary production of *The Elephant Man*. He has two commissioned works: *The 46th Street Mass* and the ballet *My Shadow*. Darryl was musical director for the acclaimed New York cabaret shows *O'Connor & Vogel: Guy & Doll* at Don't Tell Mama and *World Take Me Back* at The Space @ St. Clement's starring Broadway veteran, PJ Nelson. Darryl lives and writes in NY and is a member of The Dramatists

Guild, MAC and ASCAP.

J. Douglas Campbell and **Leonard G. Sbrocchi** (Translators) have together edited and translated Aretino's *Cortigiana* and *La Marescalco* (Carleton Renaissance Plays in Translation Series, Dovehouse Editions), Enzo Siciliano's *Caravaggio's Death and other stories* (Legas, 1997), and Dacia Maraini's *Veronica Franco. Courtesan and Poet* (Legas, 2001).

Giuseppe Solinas (Assistant Director/Dramaturg) has studied acting and directing for theatre and dance in Italy, France, Poland, U.K., and India. He has acted theatre and film and has directed plays based on Pinter, Beckett, Chekhov, Shakespeare, Buchner. For two years he directed an educational program in theatre and dance, which included performances, workshops, film, and conferences, at the University of Cagliari (Italy). He has worked as production stage manager and assistant director at the Edinburgh Festival, for dance festivals in Italy, and in NYC. Education: Italian Laurea, MA in Theatre Studies, currently a Ph.D. student in theatre at The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Jane E. House (producer) earned her Ph.D. in Theatre from The Graduate Center, CUNY, and has taught classes in acting, theatre history, and criticism at Lehman College, NYU, and Vassar. As a professional actress she performed on Broadway in *Lenny*, in national tours of *Bedroom Farve* and *An Inspector Calls*, in regional theatres, on film, and on TV, where she spent three years playing the English immigrant Liz Stuart on *As The World Turns*. She has directed plays for the Threshold Theatre Company, Love Creek Productions, and Lehman College. Her translations from Italian include full-length plays by Manlio Santanelli (w/ Antony Molino), Pier Maria Rosso Di San Secondo, Federigo Tozzi (w/ Mimi D'Aponte), Natalia Ginzburg, and short pieces by Luigi Pirandello, F.T. Marinetti, and Ettore Petrolini, many of which can be found in *20th Century Italian Drama: The First 50 Years* (Columbia Univ. Press, 1995), which she co-edited with Antonio Attisani.

Emelise Aleandri (The Singer) has performed in film, theatre and TV, including Spike Lee's films *Crooklyn* and *Summer of Sam*, *Italian Funerals and Other Festive Occasions* at the Walnut Street Theatre, and *Penguins and Peacocks* (as Eleonora Duse). She is Artistic Director of Frizzi & Lazzi the Olde Time Italian-American Music & Theatre Company.

Meg Araneo (Nene), MFA (Acting), Carnegie Mellon and the Moscow Art Theatre Sch., is pursuing her Ph.D. in Theatre at the CUNY Graduate Center. Professional credits: *The Pelican* (Gerda), *Measure for Measure* (Isabella), *The Cherry Orchard* (Varya), Sophocles' *Electra* (Electra), and *The Lower Depths* (Alyoshka). She is an active member of ENTERO, a NY-based theatre company.

Michael Bettencourt (Ensemble), an award-winning playwright with productions in NY, Boston, Chicago, LA, and Buffalo, is currently in the Dramatic Writing Program, NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. All of Michael's scripts are at <http://www.m-bettencourt.com>. As always, a special thanks to his wife and "prime mate," Maria Beatriz.

Vaneik Echeverria (Sarelli) Stage: *Jesus Hopped the A Train*, *I Don't Have to Show You No Stinking Badges*, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, *Stand Up Tragedy*, *Juno and the Paycock*, *The Miser*, *The Lady's Not for Burning*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Oedipus Rex*. TV and Film: *Law & Order*, *Above the Golden Dragon*, *Infamous*.

Donna Elliott (The Character Actress/ Signora Ignazia) I've only been acting for a "umpteens" years and yet I'm thrilled once again to have been invited. Thanks a million, Elfin!!!!

Bill Galarno (Old Comic Actor/Sampognetta) jump-started his career four decades ago as Rolf in a national tour of *The Sound of Music*, reprising that role at Manhattan's City Center. Bdwy tours: *110 in the Shade* and *Move Over Mrs. Markham* (U.S. premiere). Lincoln Center: *Candide*, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*. Regional theatre: *Noises Off* (Northern Stage, VT), *Scrooge* (Arts Trust, NJ).

Katharine Clark Gray (Totina) Other Jane House Productions: *The Part of Hamlet*, *I Married You for Fun*. Other NYC: *Strange News from Another Planet* (NY Fringe), *Estrogenius '02* and '03 (Manhattan Theatre Source); *Romeo and Juliet* (Juliet, TWUSA); and *Meat* (ATA). A playwright, Katharine's upcoming *You see me comin' you better run* opens at MTS in April. To N: like rum loves the coco.

Alene Kristal (Ensemble), an avid theatre goer, is proud to be making her theatrical debut in this performance. Alene studies voice as an avocation and has appeared in several cabaret venues in both solo and group performances. Thanks to Elfin Vogel for this opportunity, especially for the chance to use her voice in uncharted territory

Carolina McNeely (Dorina) NYC Theatre: NY Theatre Workshop's staged reading series (in *Eurydice*, with Jefferson Mays), E.S.T.'s Octoberfest, *Heartbreak House* (u/s, Pearl Theatre), *Antigone* (NY Fringe Festival). Regional: *Love's Labour's Lost* (Bathhouse), *As Bees in Honey Drown* (NJ), *Twelfth Night* (WA). Film: *Buddy*, *Mergers & Acquisitions*. TV: *The Kibbitzers* (pilot, with Charlie Callas). MFA, University of Washington.

Christopher Pollard Meyer (Pomarici), in addition to acting in theatre, film, and TV, has worked as a stand-up comic and was a founding member of the comedy teams Loud Bill and Meyer & Barber. Most recently, he was seen in La

MaMa's production of Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* and NTD's national tour of *Oh, Figaro!*

Alfredo Narciso (Nardi) understudied for The New Group's production of *Good Thing* by Jessica Goldberg. As a member of the Bat Theatre company, he performed in the OBIE winning *Benton Kozzo*, *Baal*, *Transatlantica*, and Alice Tuan's *Ajax* (por nobody). Upcoming: *The Lake* by Gary Winter, at the Flea.

Brian Tom O'Connor (Dr. Hinkfuss) has worked with director Elfin Frederick Vogel in *Cherry Orchard*, *Three Sisters*, and *Measure for Measure*, and with Debra Vogel and Darryl Curry in their cabaret: *O'Connor and Vogel: Guy & Doll*, which will have a sequel this spring. He'll be playing Falstaff in *Henry IV* at the Workshop Theater, opening March 19.

Peter Postiglione (Pometti) *The Three Musketeers* (Rochefort), *Jekyll & Hyde* (Spider), and *Joseph...Dreamcoat* (Levi), *Tony and Tina's Wedding* (Tony, Philadelphia) and *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Judas, Narberth). His favorite role was the lead in *Heroes*, a new stage comedy (NY). Commercials: ESPN, Subaru, Nissan, Harley Davidson. The greatest role of his life: a soon-to-be "Daddy" opposite his loving wife.

Nick Raio (First Customer/Ensemble) studied theatre at SUNY New Paltz. This is his 2nd appearance for Jane House Productions. Other credits *Law & Order Criminal Intent*, *The Sopranos*, *America's Most Wanted*, and numerous commercials. Favorite stage role: Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Carmine Raspaolo (Second Customer/Ensemble) has recently acted in *The Vise* and *The Imbecile* by Luigi Pirandello, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *A View from the Bridge* and *American Buffalo*. Film: *Ten Benny*, *Mickey Blue Eyes*, *It Had to be You*, *The Gothic Line* (upcoming), *The Sopranos*. Commercials: *Olive Garden*, *FinancialTimes.com*, *Verizon*. Thank you, Jane House and Elfin Vogel.

Mark Thornton (Mangini) NY credits: *The Kingdom* (Peter) with Singularity. The upcoming Workshop Theatre production of *Henry IV*. Regional: *Beauty Queen of Leenane* (Ray, Vineyard Playhouse), *Macbeth* (Malcolm, Worcester Foothills), *The Tempest* (Adrian, Shakespeare Theatre of NJ). Film: *School of Rock*, *Underton*, *Unrequited*. TV: "Sex and The City". Member: NJ Repertory Company. Training: BFA, The Hartt School.

Jason Viseltear (Ensemble) has performed most recently in the plays *Rosa and Nini*, *The Dangerous Cook*, *King George the Second*, *The Devil Festival*, and the only U.S. staging of Louis Buñuel's *Hamlet* - all productions of New York City's Doomefish Theatre Company.

Brian Voelcker (Rico Verri) Theatre: *Richard III* and *Richard II* (Off-Bdwy). *The Dancing Fox* and *Psyche* (Mettawee River Theatre); *Two Gentlemen of Verona*; *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Tulsa Rep); *Romeo and Juliet*; *Hamlet*; *Twelfth Night* (Blue Heron); *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*; *Heartland* and *Caught in the Act* (Obie award 1997). Educ: BA, Muhlenberg College; MFA Acting, Brandeis University. SAG. AEA.

Debra Vogel (Leading Actress/Mommina) teamed w/ Brian O'Connor in *O'Connor and Vogel: Guy and Doll* (Darryl Curry, musical director). Other: *George M.*; *My Fair Lady*; *Rose Marie*; *The Vagabond King*; Villa Lobos' opera *The Girl from the Clouds*; *The Snow Queen* (title role); *Teddy Bear Habit*; *Dorian Gray: A Musical Fable*; *You Can't Take It With You*; *Othello*; Ionesco's *Exit the King*; *The Philosopher's Stone*; and solo cabaret shows.

Thanks for contributions of their creative spirit are hereby extended to:

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