

City Garage presents

The Empire Builders

by Boris Vian

Directed by Frédérique Michel

Production Design by Charles A. Duncombe



March 19—April 25, 2004

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Production Design by Charles A. Duncombe

Assistant Director Paul M. Rubenstein

Cast

Maia Brewton Zenobia
Maureen Byrnes Mug
Jake Eberle Father
Katharina Lejona / Liz Hight* Mother
Bo Roberts Neighbor
Cristian YoungMiller Schmörz

Production Staff

Set & Lighting Design Charles A. Duncombe
Sound Design/Assistant Director Paul M. Rubenstein
Costume Design Michele Gingembre
Light/Sound Operator Kathryn Sheer
Publicity Photography Rick Pickman

**After April 18 the Mother will be played by Liz Hight.*

Place & Time:
Here, Now

***The play runs approximately 90 minutes
and is performed without intermission.***

City Garage is supported, in part, by grants from
The Wells Fargo Foundation,
Rocket Science Laboratories,
The Los Angeles County Arts Commission,
and The Santa Monica Arts Commission.

ABOUT THE TEXT

*"Je ne pêche que sans hameçon pour ne pas étripier les
poiscales, que je tiens en grande estime vu qu'ils causent
peu."*

—Boris Vian

A respectable family of father, mother, daughter, and their maid, flee within the confines of their home, from a strange, unknown and terrifying Noise which pursues them as they move upward from floor to floor until they reach the attic. In each room, they find the same creature—or is it not?—awaiting them: a dark, bandage-wrapped thing who suffers in silence as the family casually beats, whips, and pummels him. The Noise continues; the family's flight continues. Eventually, you might surmise, these people are going to run out of house.

It is a play that Vian wrote based on his childhood experience of the Nazi occupation and the fear inspired by their house-to-house searches during World War II. But he also wrote it just at the moment when France's long agony with its experience of colonialism—whether in Sub-Saharan Africa, Viet Nam, or Algeria—was drawing to a terrible and bloody climax. France was also beginning to feel another, ultimately more long-lasting and, to some, much more devastating effect of its dreams of empire building: the massive waves of dark-skinned immigrants from its former possessions that had begun to flood the country and who would irreversibly transform its culture and national psyche. Vian chose his title with great deliberation, and though in one way he was writing about what he remembered from his childhood, he was also writing about what was happening around him at that very moment.

You might well ask what this has to do with you.

There is every reason to believe that as this year's Presidential election draws nearer there are those who will make a strong case for how much America has to fear from its many, many enemies. They will no doubt attempt to convince us that the only correct response is one of perpetual alert, that only they can be relied on to protect us, and that our enemies are everywhere—hidden, faceless, nameless—as omnipresent and unnerving as the inexplicable Noise that drives this terrified family from floor to floor. This family too is persuaded to accept their situation without question. They too are told to act normally and yet to be afraid. And in their terror and helplessness they too punish the only thing they can lay their hands on, regardless of whether or not it was responsible for the fear they feel.

You might well ask exactly who these many, many enemies are and how they came to be so. You might well ask how keeping a population in a state of constant fear from unidentified threats serves the ends of those who would rather not invite excessive amounts of scrutiny into what else they're doing and how they're doing it. You might well ask what the consequences will be of America's recent impulses toward empire-building of its own, its aggressive unilateralism, its arrogant disregard of international consensus. You might well ask why the characterization of any dissent is immediately condemned as unpatriotic, if not treasonous. You might well ask. But there is every reason to believe that those in power would rather you not.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Boris Vian was a man of incredible gifts. He was a novelist, poet, playwright, singer, composer of more than three

hundred songs, a jazz trumpeter, translator, and engineer. Among his novels are *l'Ecume des Jours* (*Froth on the Daydream*), *l'Arrache Coeur* (*Heartsnatcher*), *l'Herbe Rouge*, and *j'Irai Cracher sur vos Tombes* (*I Spit on Your Grave*). Like his friend Sartre he loathed conventionality, but unlike Sartre, Vian was never one to take himself too seriously. All of his creative works are notable for their playfulness as well as their sophistication. Tragically, he died in 1959 of a heart attack at the age of thirty-eight. No doubt he would not have considered his death tragic, only ordinary. What he might have found tragic is how little we seemed to have learned since he wrote this play nearly fifty years ago. He wrote and sang the song you hear the beginning of this production "Monsieur le President." His jazz music is heard during the pre-show.

—Program Note by Charles Duncombe

CAST PROFILES

Maureen Byrnes

Mug

Maureen has appeared in theatre all over the U.S. and Canada and throughout Europe. Her most notable performance was in *Oh, Calcutta!* on Broadway in which she danced a nude pas de deux. She previously appeared at City Garage in *The Presidents*, *Frederick of Prussia/GeorgeW's Dream of Sleep*, *The Gertrude Stein Project*, *The Girl In The Flammable Skirt*, *Katzelmacher*, and *OedipusText: Los Angeles*.

Maia Brewton

Zenobia

2004 marks marks 22 blissful years in performance for Maia. She has appeared onstage here in *The Girl In The Flammable Skirt*, *Titus Tartar*, *Cinema Stories: Ceremonies of Unendurable Bondage* and *Katzelmacher*. She served as the Light/Sound Operator for *OedipusText: Los Angeles*

Jake Eberle

Father

After attending the Neighborhood Playhouse in NYC, Jake moved to Los Angeles. He is co-founder and director of the critically acclaimed Santa Monica based children's theater company, Imagination Station in which he has co-authored, produced and performed in 15 original plays for youths aged 1-100. Most recently, Jake was seen in *King Lear* at The MET, *Kronis and Algers Strange Beliefs* at Sacred Fools and *Hope Bloats* at the Ensemble Studio Theater. This is his first play at City Garage.

Katharina Lejona

Mother

Katharina made her City Garage debut as the Mother in Tadeusz Rozewicz's *Mariage Blanc* and has since appeared in *MedeaText: Los Angeles/Despoiled Shore*, *The Presidents*, *The Skriker*, *The Queens*, *The Gertrude Stein Project*, *Titus Tartar*, and *Katzelmacher*.

Liz Hight

Mother

This is Liz's thirteenth play at City Garage. She last appeared here in *The Sweet Madness*.

Bo Roberts

Neighbor

Bo has previously performed at City Garage in *Blood On A*

Cat's Neck; *The Universal Wolf*; *Wantons, Rogues and Libertines*; *George Sand: An Erotic Odyssey in Seven Tableaux*; *Journey's Among the Dead*; *Pre-Paradise Sorry Now*; *Manage Blanc*, *The Fetishist*, and *Katzelmacher*.

Cristian YoungMiller

Schmürz

Cristian has appeared in three productions at City Garage, *Pre-Paradise Sorry Now*, *MedeaText: Los Angeles Despoiled Shore*, and *Frederick of Prussia/GeorgeW's Dream of Sleep*. He has done numerous films and TV shows, including a recurring role on *Days of Our Lives*. Cristian recently completed *Co-Incidence*, his first feature as writer, director, and performer.

STAFF PROFILES

Frederique Michel, Artistic Director

Director

Frederique was born in Paris and studied theatre at the Conservatoire. She has directed more than eighty productions in the United States, including works by Strindberg, Rozewicz, Vinaver, Horowitz, Fornes and Barker. She received a *Dramalogue* award for her direction of *Dissident*, and has led the company as Artistic Director since its founding in 1987. Her 1998 production of *George Sand: An Erotic Odyssey in Seven Tableaux* was nominated for four L.A. Weekly Theater Awards, including Best Director. She was nominated again for Best Director for *MedeaText: Los Angeles/Despoiled Shore* (2000).

Charles A. Duncombe, Managing Director

Production Designer

Charles is a writer, director and designer. He began his partnership with Frederique Michel in 1985 with her production of *Miss Julie*, and he has designed all of her work since then. He has won two *Dramalogue* awards for production design and in 1999 won the L.A. Weekly Theater Award for Best Lighting Design for *George Sand: An Erotic Odyssey in Seven Tableaux* (1998). He was nominated for two L.A. Weekly awards for *MedeaText: Los Angeles/Despoiled Shore* (2000): Best Adaptation, and Best Set. He was nominated again for two L.A. Weekly awards for *Frederick of Prussia/GeorgeW's Dream of Sleep* (2001): Best Adaptation, and Production Design.

Paul M. Rubenstein, General Manager

Sound Designer, Assistant Director

Paul most recently appeared at City Garage in *OedipusText: Los Angeles*. He made his debut with the company in 1998 as part of the LA Weekly Theater Award-nominated ensemble from *George Sand: An Erotic Odyssey in Seven Tableaux*. He received a Backstage West Garlands Award Honorable Mention for his work here in the US premiere of Ionesco's haunting valedictory, *Journeys Among The Dead*.

Kathryn Sheer

Light/Sound Operator

Kathryn has been with City Garage for three years. She previously appeared here in *The Queens* and *The Gertrude Stein Project*, *Cinema Stories: Ceremonies of Unendurable Bondage* and *Katzelmacher*. This is her first time in the booth.

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