

City Garage presents

La Leçon

by Eugène Ionesco

Directed by Frédérique Michel

Production Design by Charles A. Duncombe



October 22, 2004—January 20, 2005

La Leçon

by Eugène Ionesco
translated by Donald M. Allen

Directed by Frédérique Michel
Production Design by Charles A. Duncombe
Assistant Director Paul M. Rubenstein

Cast

Liz Pocock Professor
Justin Davanzo Student
David Frank Butler

Production Staff

Set & Lighting Design Charles A. Duncombe
Assistant Director, Photography Paul M. Rubenstein
Costume Design Michele Gingembre
Light/Sound Operator Steve Najarro

Oil painting by French artist Guy Poinot.

The action occurs in a small town in France.

**The play runs approximately 65 minutes
and is performed without intermission.**

**Produced by special arrangement
with Samuel French, Inc.**

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The Wells Fargo Foundation,
Rocket Science Laboratories,
The Los Angeles County Arts Commission,
and The Santa Monica Arts Commission.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eugène Ionesco (born Nov. 26, 1909, Slatina, Romania; died March 28, 1994, Paris, France) Romanian-born French dramatist whose one-act "antiplay" *La Cantatrice chauve* (1949; *The Bald Soprano*) inspired a revolution in dramatic techniques and helped inaugurate the Theatre of the Absurd. He was elected to the French Academy in 1970.

Ionesco was taken to France as an infant but returned to Romania in 1925. After obtaining a degree in French at the University of Bucharest, he worked for a doctorate in Paris (1939), where, after 1945, he made his home. While working as a proofreader, he decided to learn English; the formal, stilted commonplaces of his textbook inspired the masterly catalog of senseless platitudes that constitutes *The Bald Soprano*. In its most famous scene, two strangers—who are exchanging banalities about how the weather is faring, where they live, and how many children they have—stumble upon the astonishing discovery that they are indeed man and wife; it is a brilliant example of Ionesco's recurrent themes of self-estrangement and the difficulty of communication.

In rapid succession Ionesco wrote a number of plays, all developing the "antilogical" ideas of *The Bald Soprano*; these included brief and violently irrational sketches and also a series of more elaborate one-act plays in which many of his later themes—especially the fear and horror of death—begin to make their appearance. Among these, *La Leçon* (1951; *The Lesson*), *Les Chaises* (1952; *The Chairs*), and *Le Nouveau Locataire* (1955; *The New Tenant*) are notable successes. In *The Lesson*, a timid professor uses the meaning assigned to words to establish tyrannical dominance over an eager pupil. In *The Chairs*, an elderly couple await the arrival of an audience to hear the old man's last message to posterity, but only empty chairs accumulate on stage. Feeling confident that his message will be conveyed by an orator he has hired, the old man and his wife commit a double suicide. The orator turns out to be afflicted with aphasia, however, and can speak only gibberish.

In contrast to these shorter works, it was only with difficulty that Ionesco mastered the techniques of the full-length play: *Amédée* (1954), *Tueur sans gages* (1959; *The Killer*), and *Le Rhinocéros* (1959; *Rhinoceros*) lack the dramatic unity that he finally achieved with *Le Roi se meurt* (1962; *Exit the King*). This success was followed by *Le Piéton de l'air* (1963; *A Stroll in the Air*). With *La Soif et la faim* (1966; *Thirst and Hunger*) he returned to a more fragmented type of construction. In the next decade he wrote *Jeux de massacre* (1970; *Killing Game*); *Macbeth* (1972), a retelling of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*; and *Ce formidable bordel* (1973; *A Hell of a Mess*). *Rhinoceros*, whose protagonist retains his humanity in a world where humans are mutating into beasts, remains Ionesco's most popular play.

Ionesco's achievement lies in having popularized a wide variety of nonrepresentational and surrealist techniques and in having made them acceptable to audiences conditioned to a naturalistic convention in the theatre. His tragicomic farces dramatize the absurdity of bourgeois life, the meaninglessness of social conventions, and the futile and mechanical nature of modern civilization. His plays build on bizarrely illogical or fantastic situations using such devices as the humorous multiplication of objects on stage until they overwhelm the actors. The clichés and tedious maxims of polite conversation surface in improbable or inappropriate contexts to expose the deadening futility of most human communication. Ionesco's later works show less concern with witty intellectual paradox and more with dreams, visions, and exploration of the subconscious.

CAST PROFILES

Liz Pocock

Professor

La Leçon is Liz's 14th play at City Garage since joining the company ten years ago. Other plays here include: *Nightcoil*; *The Universal Wolf*; *Girl Gone*; *Victims of Duty*; *Hamletmachine*; *Garbage, the City, and Death*; *Orgasmo* *Adulto Escapes from the Zoo*; *The Balcony*; *18th Century French Comedies*; *Noises*; *MedeaText: Los Angeles Despoiled Shore*; *The Sweet Madness*; and *The Empire Builders* (in a role originated by Katerina Lejona). She is very happy to be back on stage with David and Justin.

Justin Davanzo

Student

This production marks Justin's return to City Garage after an absence of some five years. He is pleased to be back here, where he was previously seen in *The Dumbwaiter* by Harold Pinter, *The Jungle of Cities* by Bertolt Brecht, and *The Dispute* by Marivaux. He feels very fortunate to be a part of this production.

David E. Frank

Butler

David is originally from Muncie, Indiana, where he received his degree in Theatre Performance from Ball State University. In addition to his work at BSU, he also appeared with the Vagabond Players, the Third Age Theatre Company, and The Muncie Civic Theater. His credits at City Garage include *MedeaText: Los Angeles Despoiled Shore*, *Atrocities: Meetings With Monstrous Men*, *The Skriker*, *Frederick of Prussia/GeorgeW's Dream of Sleep*, *The Gertrude Stein Project*, *Katzelmacher*, and *OedipusText: Los Angeles*.

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

Assistant Director, Photographer

Paul most recently appeared at City Garage in *Patriot Act: A Reality Show*. 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*.

Steve Najarro

Light/Sound Operator

This is Steve's second production with City Garage and his first time in the booth. He previously appeared onstage in *Katzelmacher*. Steve received a B.A. in Theatre Arts from Cal State Polytechnic University, Pomona, and continues to work on his craft at City Garage. He is a Southern California native who prides himself on his longtime passion for the theatre and a commitment to working with a unique ensemble.

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1994–2004**

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