

SYDNEY
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EDUCATION



ON CUE

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Compiled by Jacqui Cowell.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Jacqui Cowell is the Education Projects Officer for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Jacqui on jcowell@sydneytheatre.com.au

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ABOUT *ON CUE* AND STC

ABOUT *ON CUE*

STC Ed has a suite of resources located on our website to enrich and strengthen teaching and learning surrounding the plays in the STC season.

Each school show will be accompanied by an *On Cue* e-publication which will feature essential information for teachers and students, such as curriculum links, information about the playwright, synopsis, character analysis, thematic analysis and suggested learning experiences.

For more in-depth digital resources surrounding productions, please visit the STC Ed page on our website.

Such resources include:

- Documentaries
- Design sketchbooks

ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

Since 1978, Sydney Theatre Company has produced work that is – in the words of founding artistic director Richard Wherrett – “grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun.” A paradox as playful as our city.

In the 21st century, the company is dedicated to producing Australian works of ambition and scale. We create and share stories with artists and audiences that provide opportunities for reflection, revelation and joy. And we share our work widely through regional, national and international touring, partnerships and outreach activities.

Our four home venues ranging in size from 200 to 890 seat capacities allow us to develop and celebrate theatrical expression of all kinds. We keep classics alive and resonating with the present day, and our resident artist, commissioning and workshop programs ensure we continue to discover and develop the next wave of Australian stories and storytellers.

Our strategic plan commits us to building creative capacity in the community which we do through publications and events that offer life-long learning as well as experiences tailored to schools. Our partnership with The University of Sydney, School Drama, delivers theatre-based literacy learning around the country in primary schools, adult education centres, refugee groups and juvenile detention facilities.

We are proud that over the years Sydney Theatre Company has produced work with some of Australia’s – and the world’s – most exciting performers, writers, directors and creative teams; and that we continue to invest in and promote the artistic legends of the future.

sydneytheatre.com.au

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS



Caroline Brazier, Bessie Holland and Susie Youssef in Sydney Theatre Company's, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. © Daniel Boud

SUITABLE FOR

Students in Years 9 to 12

SUBJECTS

Drama Stage 5:

Dramatic forms and performance styles

Comedy

Farce

Commedia dell'arte

Clowning

Slapstick

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

ACCIDENTAL DEATH OF AN ANARCHIST

BY DARIO FO

ADAPTATION BY FRANCIS GREENSLADE AND SARAH GILES

SUPERINTENDENT
CAROLINE BRAZIER

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO
JULIE FORSYTH

INSPECTOR PISANI
BESSIE HOLLAND

MARIA FELETTI/CONSABLE 1
ANNIE MAYNARD

THE MANIAC
AMBER McMAHON

CONSTABLE 2
SUSIE YOUSSEF

DIRECTOR
SARAH GILES

DESIGNER
JONATHON OXLADE

LIGHTING DESIGNER
TRENT SUIDGEEST

COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER
STEFAN GREGORY

MOVEMENT DIRECTORS
MIKE FINCH
NIGEL POULTON

CHOREOGRAPHER
SARA BLACK

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
HEATHER FAIRBAIRN

LITERAL TRANSLATOR
THOMAS McPHERSON

VOICE & TEXT COACH
CHARMIAN GRADWELL

PRODUCTION MANAGER
WHITNEY EGLINGTON

STAGE MANAGER
NATALIE MOIR

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
BROOKE KISS

FOH SOUND OPERATOR
STEVE COYLE

WIG, MAKEUP &
WARDROBE SUPERVISOR
DIANE KANARA

DRESSER
LAUREN KENYON

REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHERS
LISA TOMASETTI

2 HOURS 6 MINUTES, INCLUDING INTERVAL

THIS PRODUCTION PREMIERED AT THE
DRAMA THEATRE, SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE,
ON 14 SEPTEMBER 2018

ACCIDENTAL DEATH OF AN ANARCHIST WAS FIRST PERFORMED BY COLLECTIVO TEATRALE LA COMUNE IN VARESE, ITALY, 1970.

PRESENTING PARTNER

ADSHL

PRODUCTION PARTNER

THE PETRE FOUNDATION



Create NSW
Arts, Screen & Culture

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SYNOPSIS

A man has fallen to his death from a police station window. Did he jump or was he pushed? The cops want a cover-up, but first they have to contend with an unlikely detective – a so-called ‘maniac’ with a knack for impersonation.

Donning a series of increasingly ridiculous guises, the ‘maniac’ professes to help the police, but in truth runs circles around the hapless officers as he conducts his counter-inquiry, revealing damning inconsistencies in their story.

It’s a glorious battle of the individual against the establishment, of anarchy against tyranny, of freedom and justice against corruption and ineptitude.

Written by Italian Nobel Laureate Dario Fo in 1970, this farce with a political sting in its tail has become an absurdist classic.



Caroline Brazier, Julie Forsyth, Mike Finch and Annie Maynard in Sydney Theatre Company's, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. © Lisa Tomasetti

THEMES AND IDEAS

CONTEXT AND HISTORY

Accidental Death of an Anarchist was written by Dario Fo in Italy in 1970. A real life event inspired Dario Fo to write the play.

Italy at that time was a dangerous place to be politically active. Neo-Fascist paramilitaries mounted a prolonged bombing campaign that killed many people, the most well known being an attack on the Red Brigades (Reddebrek, 2017). The Red Brigades was a left wing terrorist organisation based in Italy. They tried to create a revolutionary state, through violent incidents, kidnappings, assassinations and armed robberies. Bombs were being detonated in Milan by both left and right wing organisations. “There are theories that the Italian Government, exercising a ‘strategy of tension’, may have been in league with a right wing group which carried out the Milan bombing, in order to distract from the unrest in Italy at the time. The indiscriminate killing served to create a climate of fear and panic, with the intention that this would lead to popular outcry for more repressive measures from the government and military” (Sydney Theatre Company Program, 2018).

Following the defeat of Nazism and the collapse of Mussolini’s fascist government, post-war Italy was enjoying an economic boom. The right-wing Christian democratic party came to power. Although conservative forces dominated politically, an undercurrent of enlightenment was brewing in leftist and student circles. Dario Fo was part of this intellectual movement.

On 12 December 1969, a bomb went off in a busy bank in the Piazza Fontana, killing 16 people and injuring 90. In the same afternoon, three other bombs were detonated in Milan and Rome and another unexploded bomb was found.

At the time of the bombing, Giuseppe Pinelli was a member of the Milan-based anarchist association named ‘Ponte della Ghisolfia’. He was one of a number of suspects rounded up and taken to police headquarters for questioning. Records show he was questioned for five hours by police. The authorities needed someone to blame for the bombing and they had chosen Milan’s left-wing anarchists. Whilst being detained and interrogated by the police, Pinelli fell from a window to his death.



Caroline Brazier, Julie Forsyth, Amber McMahon and Annie Maynard in Sydney Theatre Company’s, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. © Lisa Tomasetti

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

Later, three neo-fascists were blamed for the bombing and Pinelli's name was cleared. However, it was never established exactly what happened when Pinelli fell out of the fourth floor of the Milan Police Headquarters (Reddebek, 2017). Based on police evidence, the judge initially ruled the death as an 'accidental death', then later changed the verdict to suicide. The police officers interrogating Pinelli, including Commissioner Calabresi, were investigated over the matter in 1971, but legal proceedings concluded the death was due to an accident and the investigation was dropped.

Dario Fo wrote and staged *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* as a counter-inquiry into the misinformation being spread about the Piazza Fontana incident. Fo and his wife Franca Rame set out to interrogate the official explanation of Pinelli's death as 'accidental'. They collected the clerk's reports, newspaper articles and official police interviews. Creating a theatrical farce from a real-life murder may seem strange. However, Fo and collaborator Rame felt the most respectful response to Pinelli's death was anger and action (Sydney Theatre Company Program, 2018).

Following the play's publication, Dario Fo and Franca Rame were taken to court more than 40 times (Reddebek, 2017). The staging of *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* in the political climate of Italy at the time was a brave and intense political move. In the first season of the play, Dario Fo prefaced the play with an improvised prologue, discussing contemporary events and connecting them to the central themes of the play.

Accidental Death of an Anarchist, although a farce, was written as a hard hitting political drama, designed to arouse anger over the death in custody of an innocent man and over the broader crimes against democracy committed by radical groups in Italy (Farrell, 2003).

CORRUPTION, TRUTH AND LIES

The inherent corruption of the Italian police force is one of the main themes in the play. All of the police characters in the play are corrupt and are colluding to cover up the true events of the interrogation and the Anarchist's death. They tell multiple lies and change their story many times in order to shift the blame away from themselves and create a credible story for the press.

Maria Feletti and The Maniac are the only characters in the play who are not corrupt. Feletti's aim is to uncover the truth. She questions and interrogates Pisani and the Superintendent about the interrogation and the events of the night the Anarchist died. Feletti questions why the police arrested left-wing anarchists, instead of pursuing the fascist and paramilitary groups who had carried out multiple bombings in previous years. Although the character of The Maniac may be clinically insane, he is not corrupt. The Maniac's aim is to uncover the truth of the night the Anarchist fell to his death and expose the corruption within the police force and legal system.

The Maniac (impersonating the Judge) orders Pisani, the Constable and the Superintendent to re-enact the events of the night the Anarchist fell to his death to create a credible story. This humorous reenactment involves the police changing their story multiple times: oscillating between admitting to abusing the Anarchist, to making jokes with him before breaking out in song (a version of 'Nostra Patria'). The Maniac encourages the police to embellish their story to avoid responsibility and and to show compassion and humanity to the press and the public, saying:

"BECAUSE YOUR VERSION OF THE TRUTH LACKS HUMANITY. THERE ISN'T A SINGLE MOMENT OF EMPATHY OR EMOTION FROM BEGINNING TO END. NOT ONE OF YOU LAUGHS. NOT ONE OF YOU GRIES. AND NOT ONE OF YOU SINGS! THE PUBLIC AND THE MEDIA WOULD FORGIVE EVERY ONE OF YOUR LAUGHABLE AND PATHETIC ATTEMPTS TO COVER UP THE TRUTH, IF THEY WERE ALLOWED, JUST ONCE, TO CATCH A GLIMPSE OF YOUR HEARTS!"
(GREENSLADE AND GILES, 2018, P 52).

The Maniac unravels the facts of the tragic event, exposing the police officers' lies, interrogation techniques and the mind games they used. The Maniac pushes the Superintendent to admit the Anarchist's alibi checks out, that the allegations were false and that the Anarchist was innocent. The Superintendent replies, "Yes, I admit it. We made a mistake" (Greenslade & Giles, 2018, p.36). Pisani, the Superintendent and the other officers all make admissions of guilt. They are so heavily influenced by The Maniac and caught up in the moment, that the Superintendent and Pisano nearly jump out of the window themselves to avoid embarrassment.

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

ANARCHY

Anarchy is defined as “A state of lawlessness or political disorder due to the absence of governmental authority” (Merriam Webster, n.d.).

Giuseppe Pinelli was a peaceful left-wing anarchist. He was a railwayman by trade and an anarchist by conviction (Farrell, 2003). He believed that anarchy is a responsibility towards other people. In a letter written on the way to the police station on the night of his death, Pinelli stated, “Anarchy isn’t violence, we reject it and we don’t want to be subjected to it. Anarchy is reason and responsibility” (Reddebek, 2017).

Anarchy is an important theme of the play, as it is based on real life events involving anarchists’ opposition to the corruption of the government, legal and police institutions in Italy in the late 1960s. In the play, the character of The Maniac repeatedly refers to the Anarchist’s last words before he fell out of the window, saying “No wonder he shouted, ‘Anarchy is dead!’ and threw himself out of the window” (Fo, Greenslade and Giles, 2018, p.36).

DISGUISE AND IMPERSONATION

In the play, The Maniac impersonates many high status people and regularly changes costumes and wears many disguises. He has been institutionalised 12 times for impersonating high ranking figures. The Maniac has a ‘Mary Poppins’ type bag he carries with him that has costume and props he uses at different points in the play.

At the beginning of the play, he impersonates a Judge, Marco Milipiero. He uses Bertozzo’s hat and coat as a disguise for the Judge. The next person The Maniac impersonates is Captain Marcantonio Banzi Piccinni from Forensics. The police are worried about The Maniac impersonating the Captain. The Maniac states, “...I’ve got priors. I was a cavalry lieutenant during the last war, a submarine commander during the armistice and a military chaplain for two months in 1967. If you’ll just give me a moment, I’ll find a disguise” (Greenslade and Giles, 2018, p.68). The Maniac’s disguise as the Captain is described in the stage directions as “He has a false moustache, a black eye patch and a false hand in a brown glove. Also a wooden leg. The Superintendent is unable to speak” (Greenslade and Giles, 2018, p.70).

The Maniac cleverly influences the police officers, so they think he is covering up his real identity as a Judge, in order for Feletti to not find out about the Judge’s investigation. The Maniac weaves a complex web of lies, creating chaos and confusion so each character has a different understanding of his identity.

The last identity assumed by The Maniac is a Bishop, Father Augusto Bernier, appointed by as the Police Liaison. The Maniac successfully convinces Maria Feletti that he is a Bishop. To dress as the Bishop, he dons a red skullcap from his bag and puts on a large ring and cross (Greenslade and Giles, 2018).

Bertozzo is outraged by The Maniac’s impersonations and the fact that the other characters believe his ridiculous disguises. He states; “So he’s a bishop too? Now do you believe me?” to which Pisani replies “Listen we know he isn’t a bishop. He’s just pretending in order to save us” (Greenslade and Giles, 2018, p.97).

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

ALL FEMALE CAST

Director Sarah Giles' creative vision for the STC production of *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* was to have an all female cast, featuring Amber McMahon as The Maniac. Sarah Giles describes Amber McMahon as a brilliantly talented clown, with extraordinary depth and boisterousness (Sarah Giles Interview, 2018). Giles considered what it would mean for a woman to play the role of The Maniac, a role that is historically played by a man:

"I WAS THINKING ABOUT SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE, AND MELISSA M^CCARTHY'S IMPERSONATION OF SEAN SPICER AND KATE M^CKINNON'S IMPERSONATION OF JEFF SESSIONS. THE THING ABOUT THESE IMPERSONATIONS IS THAT THE PERFORMER'S GENDER IS NEITHER PROVOCATION NOR DISTRACTION. IT'S KIND OF BESIDE THE POINT. BUT IT'S NOT MEANINGLESS. WOMEN HAVE LESS POWER THAN MEN. AND WHEN THE POWERLESS MOCK THE POWERFUL, IT'S INCREDIBLY FUNNY," SAYS GILES (SARAH GILES INTERVIEW, 2018).

Sarah Giles' creative decision to have an all female cast enables the production to author masculinity from a female perspective. All the actresses in the play dress in male clothing and take on male personas and characteristics, which adds another layer of complexity and humour to the play.



Annie Maynard, Bessie Holland, Amber McMahon, Caroline Brazier and Susie Youssef in Sydney Theatre Company's, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. © Daniel Boud

CHARACTER ANALYSIS



Amber McMahon in
Sydney Theatre Company's
Accidental Death of an Anarchist.
© Daniel Boud

THE MANIAC

The Maniac is a product of Fo's imagination, as there is no real-life counterpart among the participants in the events surrounding the bombing of the Piazza Fontana (see page 6).

The Maniac is a figure deeply rooted in the theatrical tradition of Commedia dell'arte, a style of theatre which puts the actor, not the playwright, at the heart of the play. The Maniac is the updated representation of the Harlequin character from the tradition of Commedia dell'arte. He is cunning, disrespectful towards authority, quick-witted and perceptive. He exists in a dimension of his own, owing loyalty to no one. His behaviour is disconcerting as he switches sides, first supporting the police then changing and supporting the journalist, Maria Feletti, with her enquiries.

The Maniac has been arrested 12 times for impersonation, most recently for impersonating a psychiatrist. The Maniac uses his talents of impersonation and manipulation to uncover the truth of what happened on the night the Anarchist fell to his death. His impersonations include playing a Judge reopening the enquiry, a Captain who is a forensics expert and lastly a Bishop.

His penchant for dressing up and impersonating other people is invaluable in his quest to find the truth and mock authority. "In this play, the madman (The Maniac) is the personification of reason and guardian of public morality. He has a cause – the unveiling of police and official lies in the Pinelli case – which he prosecutes with tenacity, vigour and a grotesque humour" (Farrell, 2003, p.47).

The Maniac is a licensed fool and a clown. He seems to have no past life or real identity, with the exception of references to time spent in mental institutions.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS (CONT.)

MARIA FELETTI

Maria Feletti, the only female character in the play, is based on the real life journalist Camilla Cederna of the left-wing weekly publication, L'Espresso. Camilla Cederna wrote the book *Pineli, a window on the Massacre*.

In the play, Maria Feletti is the character with the most common sense and the only character with a moral compass. She is trying to uncover the truth of what happened to the Anarchist that night. The police officers try to avoid her questions as she reveals many inconsistencies in their story. The Maniac has fun with Maria and the police officers, oscillating between supporting Maria then the police, confusing everyone present and enjoying the drama of the situation.

The journalist Maria Feletti represents danger. She is called The Vulture by the male police characters. She has a reputation for asking awkward questions and being a hard hitting journalist. As The Maniac explains to the Superintendent "They call her 'The Vulture'. With a capital V – forget about it. If you cancel the appointment, she'll tear you to pieces in tomorrow's paper" (Fo, *Greenslade and Giles*, 2018, p.66). In this production there is a sense that Maria Feletti might be in danger too. The Superintendent and Pisani show physical dominance over Feletti to threaten her and make her feel uncomfortable.



Annie Maynard in
Sydney Theatre Company's
Accidental Death of an Anarchist.
© Lisa Tomasetti

CHARACTER ANALYSIS (CONT.)

INSPECTOR PISANI

Inspector Pisani is a satirical representation of Commissario Luigi Calabresi, the chief interrogating officer present at the death of Pinelli. It was Calabresi who was in charge of many of the arrests for bombings, including the Fiera di Milano bombing. He was also chiefly responsible for the seemingly accidental death of Pinelli.

In the play, Dario Fo nicknames Pisania 'Finestra-cavalcioni' which literally translates to 'window-straddle'. Calabresi was given this nickname because of his penchant for having suspects sit on the windowsill whilst being interrogated and taunted to jump.

INSPECTOR BERTOZZO

Inspector Bertozzo has the rank of Commissario, an Inspector. Comically, he is the butt of other's jokes and acts as the 'sidekick' in comic routines. His role is not so much to advance the satire as to arouse derisive laughter. He is the only one who knows The Maniac is a lunatic, while the others are fooled by his many disguises.

Bertozzo is ridiculed by the other police officers when he repeatedly tries to explain The Maniac's real identity. He is abused and satirised for his ideas. Bertozzo and The Maniac are on converse character journeys: while The Maniac is revealed to be sane, Bertozzo is driven to the point of insanity by The Maniac.



Caroline Brazier, Julie Forsyth, Bessie Holland and Susie Youssef in Sydney Theatre Company's, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. © Daniel Boud

CHARACTER ANALYSIS (CONT.)



Caroline Brazier, Bessie Holland and Susie Youssef in Sydney Theatre Company's, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. © Lisa Tomasetti

SUPERINTENDENT

The Chief of Police or Superintendent in Milan at the time of Pinelli's death was Marcello Guida. Guida was not present at the time of Pinelli's death. However, he was instrumental in the cover up, denying there were records of the interrogation, then changing the story of the events of that night to cover up the actions of police. Pinelli's widow raised an unsuccessful action against Marcello Guida after Pinelli's death. Guida had been a government official under Mussolini's fascist regime and in 1942 had been commandant of a prison camp for anti-fascist activists in Italy.

In the play, the Superintendent believes The Maniac is a Judge investigating what happened on the night of the Anarchist's death. He reacts defensively to the Maniac's accusations, but also goes along with The Maniac when it suits him. He is a straight shooting character who is easily swayed. He is willing to lie and fabricate events to make sure he is not to blame.

CONSTABLES

The two constables are clowns, foolish bystanders and buffoons. The police officers wait for things to happen and are affected by the high status characters. The constables follow orders immediately, though not always correctly, often getting instructions wrong. Dario Fo pokes fun at the institution of the police through creating such simple-minded and incompetent characters.

STYLE

PHYSICAL COMEDY / CLOWNING / SLAPSTICK

Although the true story behind the play is tragic, Dario Fo wrote the play as a farcical comedy. The style of the play is a combination of comedy, clowning, slapstick, Commedia dell'arte and farce. In this production of the play, the creative team sought to heighten the comedic style of the play through physical gags and physical comedy.

In the rehearsal room, the cast worked with fight and movement directors Nigel Poulton and Mike Finch. The physical sequences include fight scenes, chase sequences and a song and dance routine. There are a variety of physical gags incorporated into the stage action.

The song and dance routine involves The Maniac rounding up the policemen to join him in a song. The routine is performed in an under-rehearsed fashion with The Maniac leading the way, rousing the policemen into a semi-convincing performance. The Maniac convinces the officers to say they lifted the anarchist's spirits during interrogation.

A new character of a female cleaner has been included in this adaptation of *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. Each actor plays the cleaner at some point in the play. The cleaner is the lowest status character in the story; she is hit and abused by the high status police officers who don't seem to see her at all. These physical comedy moments are built into the stage action and the exits and entrances of characters.

FARCE

In a commentary about *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, Farrell (2003) states that Dario Fo's contributions to theatre include a talent for inventiveness, fun, an ability to make zany observations on life and a taste for the nonsensical. As well as being at home in the realms of the Absurd, Fo took a wayward glance at the affairs of men and women.

From the outset, Farce was the favoured style for Dario Fo as an actor and a writer. He told an interviewer "I want to rehabilitate Farce. Theatre Critics have adopted the habit of writing that an unsuccessful comedy 'declines into farce'. Now I believe that Farce is a noble and modern genre of theatre" (Farrell, 2003). At the time when Fo was creating theatre, Farce had been long despised by critics as vulgar entertainment. It was known in the post-war period as the best vehicle suited for the philosophical outlook known as 'The Absurd'. After the war and the defeat of Nazism and Fascism, there was a sense of world-weariness, futility and pessimism in Europe. Farce and Absurdist theatre emerged at this time in response to the general sense of futility and pessimism.

With *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, Fo wanted to compel the audience to meditate on human responsibility. He thought that Farce was the most effective way of provoking thought about the issue, with laughter being a mechanism for triggering critical thought. His aim was to provoke debate, challenge the audience to consider new points of view and leave the theatre challenged by ideas (Farrell, 2003).

STYLE (CONT.)

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

The basis for the physical comedy in the play is Commedia dell'arte, a form of Italian comedy. Commedia dell'arte began in the 16th Century as improvised performances with lots of well-known gags and slapstick comedy. Commedia dell'arte was performed by troupes in piazzas and on outdoor stages. Actors developed lazzi (stock comic scenarios). Daro Fo's work incorporates aspects of Commedia dell'arte including clowning techniques and comic scenarios (Tourelle & McNamara, 2000).

Director Sarah Giles used aspects of Commedia dell'arte in the rehearsal process for this production. She worked with the actors to create their own lazzi and comic scenarios. The cast also played with status, creating physical comedy with the higher and lower status characters for comic effect and physical gags.



Bessie Holland, Julie Forsyth, Caroline Brazier and Amber McMahon Sydney Theatre Company's, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. © Lisa Tomasetti

THE ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION



SET DESIGN

The Designer Jonathon Oxlade describes the set as functioning like another character in the play. The set is used in a way that supports the farcical action. There are revolving doors and surprise entrances and exits utilised for comic effect. The set is inspired by the aesthetic style of a 1960s/1970s police station. The office furniture and props are true to the time period. There are two floors of the police station: the third floor and the fourth floor. When the action of the play moves to the fourth floor, the change is indicated by a shift in the scenery visible through the window. The subtly altered perspective on the city shows us that although the office looks exactly the same, we are now on a different floor level.

The Designer Jonathon Oxlade and Director Sarah Giles wanted the window to be a prominent centrepiece in the set design because of the importance of the window to the story. Trent Suidgeest, the Lighting Designer, has created the effect of light coming through the window to show the change from morning to evening.

COSTUME DESIGN

The costumes are designed in the style of the late 1960s, spilling into the early 1970s. The Designer Jonathon Oxlade was inspired by costumes from TV shows including *Get Smart*, *Seinfeld* and *Fawlty Towers*.

As all of the characters are played by female actors, the costumes, wigs and make-up are essential elements to create masculine characters on stage. Suits, pants, shirts, ties and wigs have been used. The male costuming is important to help the actors transform into men, including the addition of facial hair, wigs and the shape of the clothing. The costume for The Maniac has a charlatan, bohemian feel, giving the impression that he is a suave, worldly character in 1970s style.

Q&A WITH SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER

JONATHON OXLADE

What were the very first ideas and emotions that came to you after reading the script with the knowledge you would be designing for STC's interpretation?

The play is essentially about a madman, or rather a perceived maniac, entrapping crooked cops into revealing themselves and sending them mad in the process. So we wanted the space to reflect that madness, and all of our characters to embody it too. That was the feeling that Sarah [Giles] and I were first excited about playing with... the insanity of it all! Because that madness is so close to reality. We listen to people like Donald Trump say things that on the one hand we consider absolute madness, and yet it's in the real world vernacular. We're so used to people in power trying to prove that they're on top of what's happening when they really aren't, that we often just suck it up. The Maniac, however, challenges it.

The set of *Anarchist* is essentially an office, but hardly a regular one. We're in a police station in late '60s Milan – how have you referenced that in the design?

Anarchist is set in Italy in the 1960s/70s, so we've gone to town with that era. Our office is a heightened and anachronistic world; there are things in there from other eras but ultimately it should feel clearly of its time. The costumes are very much late 60s early 70s in style; there are some seriously wide pant-legs and flares in there.

There's a lot of slapstick, movement based comedy in this play and my understanding is the set is very much involved in that. What has it been like designing a set that has its own gags?

That's a good question because the set works kind of like a secondary character. It has personality and influence, with bits and pieces that The Maniac can use for his own benefit. There are theatrical rules and an element of magical realism: the cops are trapped in a very mundane space – rules apply to them here that don't apply to The Maniac, who can use the set to slip between time and appear in different places.

Mostly the challenge is finding the right tool or object for the job. There are a lot of moving parts and a lot of stuff in this show. People are picking up staplers and throwing them at walls; there are all sorts of things that have to function in a certain way and be believable, but not actually dangerous. It's like a modified version of reality, which is slightly tricky to keep up with. The rehearsal room is such an exciting space to be in, and everyone's such a great clown and a great builder of ideas, but the task and tricky bit for me is making those ideas actually function. We're trying our darndest!

So you're still very closely involved in rehearsals?

I try to be in the room as much as I can, and if I'm not I'm out looking for costume items and prop items and set pieces. There's also a fight choreographer in there, Mike Finch, who is the ex-director of Circus Oz, so he's got lots of clowning and slapstick history and technique. And we've been working together to find, for example, the perfect tin tray to smash over someone's head so it doesn't hurt them but makes a great sound. Most things that get used in the set have very specific requirements, which means lots of testing and lots of options.

The panoramic window is the centrepiece of your design. How are you using this feature and why?

The window is quite essential to the mathematics of the storytelling. It's a very important element of the plot – basically a piece of evidence. The Maniac is trying to prove that the crooked cops actually threw someone out of this window. The window is definitely a centrepiece in the design and Sarah and I talked early on about making it quite prominent. The theatre space that we're in is really widescreen, so we were able to make it large to fit. The play also spans from morning to evening, so we thought it would be a really beautiful thing to show through that window the Milan landscape as the light changes, coming to life with lights in the evening. It's just a very picturesque thing which frames the space. There's also some fun activity that happens in the exterior... look out for flying objects!

So you're weaving a lot of humour into the set and props – have you carried that playfulness over into costuming?

We have – some of the references that Sarah and I looked at for costuming were *Seinfeld*, *Fawlty Towers*, *Get Smart*... These characters have to play the truth but we can still give them elements of caricature and, with the help of some padding here and there, turn them into recognisable stereotypes.

How did the gender-swap element factor into your costume design?

The task is to transform them into men, so we're aiming for full authenticity, including body shape, facial hair and wigs, so you might even see someone that's quite bald. We're aiming to convince people that these characters are men, and the actors are really helping with that as well through the portrayal of really idiosyncratic alpha male physicality and stances. Sometimes we like to go over the top with it – like how wide can a man-spread spread?

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