

Winter 2-29-1996

Ubu Roi

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Authors

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By Alfred Jarry
9th CABARET

UBU ROI

BY ALFRED JARRY TRANSLATED BY BARBARA WRIGHT

9TH ANNUAL RISD CABARET FEBRUARY 29 - MARCH 3, 1996

THERE WILL BE NO INTERMISSION THIS EVENING

DIRECTOR	Sylvie Toux
LITERARY DIRECTOR AND CO-PRODUCER	Agnieszka Taborska
CHOREOGRAPHER AND CO-DIRECTOR	Nola Rocco
MUSICAL DIRECTOR	Steven L. Jobe
PRODUCER	Bill Newkirk
PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER	Vivian Law
LIGHTING DESIGN	Chee-Heng Yeong, Matt DeSmith, Simon Potter, Malikha Washington with Matt Moreau
LIGHTING CONSULTANT	Julie Cipolla
POSTER DESIGN	Jan Lenica

A WORD OR TWO ABOUT JAN LENICA

Jan Lenica, one of Europe's leading poster designers, has lived and worked in other dimensions, including Poland, Paris and Berlin. A 360° artist, Lenica is also an art critic, a cartoonist and the globally acclaimed director of prize winning animated films. Among his most renowned films is "Ubu and the Great Belly". Lenica's recurring themes are particularly Ubuesque: oppression, surrealist illusion, absurdity. By turns, Lenica's films are subversive and poetic, political and dreamlike. With its simple, elegant line and motion his animation owes much to the spirit of Art Nouveau graphic design.

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MUSICAL SELECTIONS AND EXCERPTS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

- 1 Theme by Giovanni Pergolesi (1710-1736) arranged by Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)
- 2 Opening fanfare from the ballet "Parade" by Eric Satie (1866-1925)
- 3 Songs: "The Royal Toilet" (trans. by Stanley Chapman) and "We are the Palcontents" (from "Ubu Cuckolded", trans. by Cyril Connolly) by Steven L. Jobe
- 4 "Song of the Disembraining" (trans. by Barbara Wright) based on "Gnossienne I" by Eric Satie, arranged by Steven L. Jobe
- 5 "Gymnopedie III" by Eric Satie
- 6 "Unappetizing Chorale" from "Sports and Diversions" by Eric Satie

ORCHESTRA

Frank Difficult - Noise and sound sculpture
 Laura Gulley - Violin
 Gerry Heroux - Trumpet, French horn
 Steven L. Jobe - Bassoon, contra-bassoon, guitar, hurdy-gurdy
 Alec K. Redfearn - Accordion
 JasmineWinkler - Bassoon

EXHIBITIONS

Don't miss three exhibitions connected to the Cabaret:
 Ubu Exhibition — Waterman Building Lobby; Publications related to UBU ROI — RISD Library; Jan Lenica's Posters — Graphic Design Gallery, Design Center, First Floor.

C A S T A N D C R E D I T S

PÈRE UBU	Joseph Silva
MÈRE UBU	Marisa Nealon
CAPTAIN BORDURE	Jeremy Siew
KING VENCESLAS	Matt DeSmith
QUEEN ROSEMONDE	Helen Lee
BOLESLAS	Roslyn Wiria
LADISLAS	Janine L. Burt
BOUGRELAS	Matt Moreau
GIRON	Jessica Guarino
PILE	Kathy Leung
COTICE	Jennifer Norton
THE EMPEROR ALEXIS	Matt DeSmith
THE WHOLE RUSSIAN ARMY	Mutsuko Kasai
THE WHOLE POLISH ARMY	Raoul Kim
GENERAL LASCY	Roslyn Wiria
STANISLAW LE CZINSKI	Simon Potter
JEAN SOBIESKI	Jenny Tu
PEASANT	Matt Moreau
NICOLAS RENSKY	Jenny Tu
MESSENGER	Mutsuko Kasai
CONSPIRATOR	Jenny Tu
PEOPLE	Mutsuko Kasai, Matt Moreau Jenny Tu, Roslyn Wiria
MICHEL FEDEROVITCH	Jenny Tu
NOBLES	Raoul Kim, Matt Moreau Roslyn Wiria
MAGISTRATES	Pei-Ju Chuang, Matt DeSmith Jeremy Siew
COUNSELORS	Matt Moreau, Helen Lee Jenny Tu, Roslyn Wiria
FINANCIERS	Mutsuko Kasai, Helen Lee
THE CAPTAIN OF THE SHIP	Jeremy Siew
FATHER TIME	Pei-Ju Chuang
VOICE OF ANCESTORS	Jeremy Siew
VOICE FROM THE TOMB OF JEAN SIGISMOND	Jeremy Siew

PROPS	COSTUMES
Janine L. Burt	Janine L. Burt
Pei-Ju Chuang	Jennifer Norton
Mutsuko Kasai	Jenny Tu
Raoul Kim	Karla Zimonja
Helen Lee	with the assistance of:
Kathy Leung	Pei-Ju Chuang
Matt Moreau	Jessica Guarino
Marisa Nealon	Mutsuko Kasai
Jennifer Norton	Raoul Kim
Jeremy Siew	Helen Lee
Joseph Silva	Kathy Leung
Jenny Tu	Marisa Nealon
Diego Velasco	Jeremy Siew
Roslyn Wiria	Roslyn Wiria

HURDY - GURDY
 "Organistrum I" was designed by Steven L. Jobe and constructed by Nathaniel Pearson (RISD '93).

STAGE CONSTRUCTION
 Simon Potter
 Hugh Walton (designer)
 Malikha Washington

RECONSTRUCTED NABIS PAINTING
 Matt Moreau
 Marisa Nealon

PÈRE UBU'S CHAIR
 Clarence Brewer, sculptor, Springfield, MO

SCREEN CONSTRUCTION
 Simon Potter
 Malikha Washington

SOUND
 Matt DeSmith

SLIDES
 Daniel Marin

STAGEHANDS
 Jeremy Siew
 Jenny Tu

VIDEO DOCUMENTATION
 Marcin Gizycki
 Megan McLarney
 Peter O'Neill

GRAPHIC DESIGN
 Matt DeSmith - flyers, poster, program, tickets
 Vivian Law - flyers, poster, program
 Daniel Marin - silkscreen poster, flyers

PROGRAM EDITOR
 Margaret Lewis

EXHIBIT DESIGN
 Joseph Quackenbush

ASST. EXHIBIT DESIGN
 Matt DeSmith

PUPPETS
 Heather Marble

PROGRAM ILLUSTRATIONS
 Alfred Jarry

S P E C I A L T H A N K S

Diane Blair, RISD, Division of Foundation Studies (for her everyday help)
 Brown University Creative Writing Program (for lending us the risers)
 David Chandler, RISD, Media Resources (for his technical assistance)
 Jan Lenica, Berlin (for donating the design of his poster)
 Krzysztof Lenk, RISD, Graphic Design Department (for organizing Jan Lenica's exhibition)
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 Andrzej Matynia, Warsaw (for video materials)
 Erik Reinertsen (for poster distribution)

Donald Morton, RISD, Media Resources (for his technical assistance)
 Bill Newkirk, (for lending us Lenica's posters)
 RISD Division of Foundation Studies (for letting us use their studios)
 RISD Division of Liberal Arts (for sponsoring us)
 RISD Office of Student Life (for poster distribution)
 RISD Type Shop (for letting us work there and for their expert assistance)
 Walter Szrek (for lending us Jan Lenica's posters)
 Keith Waldrop, Brown University (for sharing inspiring memories about his 1960 production of Ubu Roi)
 Josh Wood (for organizing the exhibition in the Library)

A B O U T T H I S S H O W

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ITS NINE YEAR HISTORY, THE RISD CABARET PRESENTS A PLAY INSTEAD OF A COLLAGE OF TEXTS AND SONGS. We could not resist the temptation to celebrate the one hundred year anniversary of the premiere of Jarry's "Ubu Roi" - a play which has influenced the development of 20th century art as has no other play. We have interpreted it but kept the most important characteristics of the original performance. Faithful to Jarry's rebellious mind, we played against the text and music with mechanical movements and speech. The actors adopted the souls of puppets to incarnate Jarry's timeless types.

By reconstructing the lost Nabis canvas and the mask based on Jarry's woodcuts, the students learned about late 19th century French art. By making the costumes as universal as possible, they fulfilled Jarry's wish and practised the art of synthesis. The use of Eric Satie's music allowed them to penetrate deeper into the spirit of the epoch.

The main question we had to answer was "what does this play mean to an almost-21st-century audience?" How can we compensate for the shock of Jarry's breaking the rules of theatre and his use of obscene language, which doesn't shock anymore? Some contemporary directors facing the same problem have introduced sex as an important element - such is the case with the Boston Repertory Theatre production of "Ubu Rock". However, sex is absent in "Ubu Roi", in contrast to "Ubu Cuckolded" and "Ubu in Chains", both from Jarry's Ubu cycle. We concentrated, therefore, on the image of Père Ubu and his universal aspect: where does power lead to, how does the violence of this imaginary despotic monarch and the grotesque war he is responsible for reflect the issues of our time?

We take this opportunity to thank people we worked with: Nola, Steve, Bill, Joe and all our students. It was a difficult process during which we constantly had to make the effort to go back in time in order to understand the sensibility of late 19th century Europe. We hope, however, that it was worthwhile for both actors and audience.

Sylvie Toux and Agnieszka Taborska

"UBU" PRESENTED US WITH MANY PHYSICAL AND THEATRICAL CHALLENGES. We had to rediscover how Jarry expressed his nonsensical yet prophetic ideas with just a single performer and with grand scenic landscapes, such as "The Battle". The images of a spine shifting along its vertical axis and a chess game in a state of constant flux gave us our starting point for the stylized Guignol gestures of Jarry's original staging. Although the mechanical and puppet-like movement appeared limiting at first, we discovered freedom within its confines by designing two-dimensional human friezes which seem to glide and hang inside a grid. These graphic ideas have continued to inform us about our process—the ultimate "product" of this performance.

Nola Rocco



T H E R I S D C A B A R E T

MERDRE! THE DESPOT UBU ROI IS AT LARGE IN PROVIDENCE

The experimental art history and performance course we know as the RISD Cabaret springs from a 1987 proposal by Brown University Professor Emeritus James O. Barnhill and RISD's Szymon Bojko to "directly involve students and immerse them in the art and culture of a particular time and place". Since their proposal, we have benefitted each year from this fertile idea and the hard work of Cabaret students. The educational goals of the Cabaret are not unique, but somehow the experience is. This is not a normal RISD course, certainly not a normal Liberal Arts course. For the last nine years students have become a part of historic milieux by performing translated or original texts, or hypothetical scenes. The Russian, German, Austrian, French and Italian avant-garde of the early decades of this century have all come alive at RISD in a way that could not happen passively in a conventional classroom. It is the direct involvement of students as actors and designers that gives life and meaning to the Cabaret material as it is selected, edited and performed. If all goes well, we are swept into another place or time as participant observers, enriched and open to the culture of the day or the folly of the moment.

But the success and depth of the Cabaret learning experience is not just demonstrated by the content of the material and the intensity of the performance. It depends as well on the research, rehearsal, and development of an esprit de corps as the public presentation approaches. By this point the texts and staging, the music and acting, choreography and content, have been edited and fought over, justified and criticized with an intensity far beyond that expected in most Liberal Arts classes. Still, it is precisely because of the public nature of the performance, the replacement of the lecture hall by the music hall and the desire to successfully communicate to a larger audience, that the performers, researchers, and technicians reach a special level of commitment. In this way, thanks to them, we can all share in the best and most personal manner Liberal Arts at RISD.

The chronicle of past cabarets is rich: "From St. Petersburg to Khrushchev's Boot" (1987), "The Golden Age of Cabaret" (1988), "The Ox on the Roof" (1989), "The Unknown and Awakening Europe" (1991), "Tabou" (1992), "The Big Yes and the Little No"

(1993), "The Life and Times of Joseph Beuys" (1994), "Hoppla! Here Comes Grosz" (1995). Each cabaret has brought new talent and individuals to focus on a point of view, place, time, or individual artist important to the development of our culture. All of them incorporated historical data and original material to sharpen our awareness and our students' understanding of the relationship of art to social commentary. The performances have always shown the depth of commitment and the wealth of inventiveness and knowledge that make RISD students so rewarding to work with. Each year also, the intensity and necessarily extraordinary level of involvement has caused the director, the choreographer, the sponsoring faculty, the students, individually or in concert to say "NEVER AGAIN", but each year they come back. Or they let one year pass and then they are back. Over the past few years, Szymon Bojko and Agnieszka Taborska have alternated as literary directors and Cabaret muse and James O. Barnhill's benevolent presence is always felt whether he is on Benefit Street or in Pakistan. Since 1991 Bill Newkirk and Foundation Studies have been more involved, giving the Cabaret a home on the third floor of the Waterman Building and backing the studio portion of the course.

This year's production features Bill as producer, Agnieszka as researcher and literary director, Nola Rocco as choreographer, and Steven Jobe as musical director, composer, and inventor of the world's largest hurdy-gurdy. In keeping with the tradition of Brown faculty (Julie Strandberg, Mark Cohen and the inimitable James O. Barnhill) involvement in the Cabaret, Sylvie Toux of Brown University's French Department is director of "Ubu Roi". The production team and their students have reanimated Alfred Jarry's villainous 100-year-old Ubu. The intervening century and our unfortunate familiarity with Stalin, Hitler, Amin, Pol Pot and their ilk have proven that Jarry's Ubu is more canny than absurd. Tonight in the Waterman Building the king is alive but hopefully, combatted with knowing laughter, this particular kind of tyrannosaurus rex will become extinct with the close of the twentieth century.

Edward Dwyer
ASSOCIATE PROVOST
Baruch Kirschenbaum
DEAN, LIBERAL ARTS

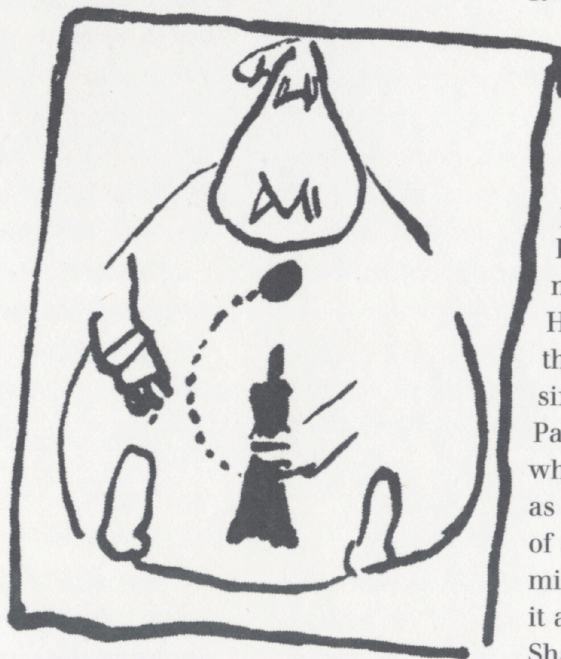
ABOUT THE PLAY, ITS AUTHOR AND THE GHOST IN THE WATERMAN BUILDING

“The last sublime debauchee of the Renaissance” (Apollinaire); “a wild animal entering the ring” (Madame Rachilde); “Our Lord on Earth, but turned inside out” (Max Jacob) - such were contemporary descriptions of Alfred Jarry, the author of “Ubu Roi”. Jarry, “the last high-powered romantic” (Amedée Ozenfant), “first sublime humorist of the Apocalypse” (Nigey Lennon), “a distorted image of Faust...the extreme case in history of literary mimesis” (Roger Shattuck). Jarry, a visionary, the defender of Symbolism, the most perfect Pataphysician, incarnation of Ubu Roi, a hallucinating poet who died on All Saints Day, 1907 at the age of 34, his last request being for a toothpick. Jarry a non-conformist and an eccentric feared for his provocations. A modern Rabelais who defied the boundaries between humor and seriousness and who illustrated the theory of his master Bergson about the “scientific” nature of humor. A clown and a magician. The soul-mate of Baudelaire who carried his ideas a little bit further. A glorifier of masks who, by becoming the grotesque character he had created, made his life “as lovely as literature” and, using the term of Gerard de Nerval, “directed his dream.” A madman who polarized in himself all the paradoxes, fears and obsessions of the turn-of-the-century and who keeps coming to mind as another century is close to its end.

In the 1880s Jarry put his imprint on the future of 20th century theatre, literature and visual arts. He supported the modern painters of his time—Bonnard, Serusier, Vuillard and Toulouse-Lautrec designed

the set for “Ubu Roi”. Jarry was among the first to “discover” Douanier Rousseau. He recognized before others primitive and popular art, influenced Fauvism, Cubism and Dadaism, and shaped the imaginations of other solitary artists—Picasso, Satie, Duchamp and Apollinaire. In 1927 Antonin Artaud and Roger Vitrac founded the “Théâtre Alfred Jarry” and in the 1940’s Jean Cocteau developed some of Jarry’s ideas on theatre: the use of masks, a single set, and the return to the tradition of Guignol.

In 1949 a group of Jarry’s admirers founded the College of Pataphysics in Reims. Among its members were Ionesco, Duchamp, Dubuffet, René Clair, Jacques Prévert, Raymond Queneu, and Michel Leiris.



“Surrealists invented nothing better, and they had good reason to recognize him as a forerunner,” attested Gide. No other artist of Jarry’s time informed the Surrealists’ ideal as fully as he did by dismissing the boundaries between dream and waking,

art and life, childhood and adulthood, the conscious and the unconscious. “Talking about things that are understandable only weighs down the mind and falsifies the memory, but the absurd exercises the mind and makes the memory work” (Jarry).

As proof of the triumph of the science (or antiscience) of Pataphysics invented by him (called also the Science of Imaginary Solutions or Science of the Particular: of Laws Governing Exceptions), among all his works “Ubu Roi” is most remembered. “Les Polonais” (“The Poles”), the prototype for “Ubu Roi,” was a grotesque farce Jarry wrote in high school in Rennes in 1888 to ridicule the pompous, fat and uncurably bourgeois physics teacher known as Père Hébert. It was first performed by students as a marionette show.

“Ubu Roi” is considered the first example of the Theatre of the Absurd. Few events in theatrical history provoked such turmoil as its Parisian premiere in 1896, much like the “battle” of Victor Hugo’s “Hernani” had marked the beginning of Romanticism sixty-six years before. Literary Paris was split between those who discarded the performance as the embarrassing product of an indomitably rebellious mind and others who glorified it as a masterpiece equal to Shakespeare’s plays. The introductory speech given by the author and the first word spoken by the actor playing Ubu, “Merdre” (Shittr), made some spectators leave the house and others climb on their seats in a gesture of protest. After this historic premiere, discussed for many weeks in the papers,

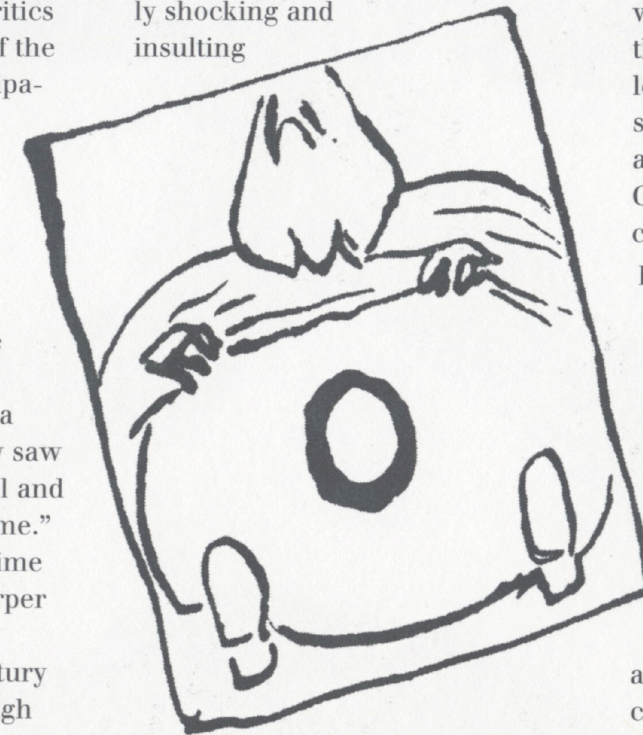
twenty-three year old Jarry became a famous personality of the Parisian “Belle Epoque.”

The most clairvoyant critics saw in “Ubu Roi” a symbol of the end of one era and the anticipation of another. “A new type has emerged,” wrote Catulle Mendès, “Père Ubu exists... He will become a popular legend of base instincts, rapacious and violent...” André Gide called the play “the most extraordinary thing seen in the theatre for a long time.” And Sacha Guitry saw in it one of “the most original and powerful burlesques of all time.”

Jarry didn’t define the time or place of his play. The usurper Ubu, an ever existing type, remains a threat as 20th century dictators have paraded through modern history. “As for the action, that takes place in Poland, that is to say, Nowhere,” he stated. The non-existent country divided into three empires was the most ideal, since the most abstract location. “Nowhere is everywhere, but most of all it is the country we happen to be in at the moment.”

For its creator, Père Ubu symbolized the mediocrity which surrounded him and which he hated most. “Ubu, with his cupidity, stupidity, ferocity, and cowardice, symbolized Jarry’s revolt against the accepted values of the time. Jarry did not make Ubu the embodiment of ‘vice’ in order to present a ‘vile’ character but, on the contrary, in order to show up all the establishment figures around him - kings, nobles, generals, magistrates; Ubu’s very presence strips them of their false pretensions and sentiments,” wrote Barbara Wright, the excellent translator of Jarry’s play.

After the premiere’s “succes du scandale” Jarry became more eccentric than ever, continuously shocking and insulting



the bourgeoisie (wandering the streets in a ragged overcoat, slippers, a fur tiara, and armed with revolvers), literally becoming his infamous hero. He referred to himself as “le Père Ubu,” adopted a peculiar “Ubuesque” way of speaking and used the royal “we.” The magic circle was closed. Faithful to his maxim which dismissed the difference between life and literature, the author violated his own identity and was transformed into his creation which, in turn, was based on real life. “Beginning with Jarry,” wrote André Breton, “... the differentiation long considered necessary between art and life has been challenged...” Penniless, living in a shabby apartment in the company of two owls (first alive and later stuffed), starving and immersing himself in absinthe and ether, Jarry patiently followed the path of self-destruction. As extravagant as this end may appear to a ratio-

nal 20th century reader, it seemed the logical choice for someone who had merged life with literature and who saw the world around him as senseless and corrupt. “Jarry’s life seems to have been directed by a philosophical concept,” wrote Gabriel Brunet, “...(his) teaching could be summarized thus: every person is capable of showing contempt for the cruelty and stupidity of the universe by making his own life a poem of incoherence and absurdity.” Before giving a negative answer to the question “to be or not to be?” Jarry first answered, “to be, but somebody else.”

In the 1990’s many theatres are commemorating the centenary of the premiere of “Ubu Roi.” “Ubu Gallery” in New York, devoted to Surrealism, is preparing an exhibition on Jarry. The extravagant drama “Ubu Rock,” which opened in 1995 at the Boston Repertory Theatre, although far from the spirit of the original, pays a popular culture tribute to its source. As much as Jarry would be furious about the inclusion of his work in the repertory dutifully seen by the respectable bourgeois, he would probably approve of its performance in an art school. And since he was an adept in the esoteric arts popular at the end of every century, his ghost haunted the RISD Cabaret rehearsals, and will certainly join the audience as it climbs the dark and mysterious stairs of the Waterman Building.

Agnieszka Taborska

