

About Proscenium

George Woollands and Margaret Rendle
founded Proscenium in 1924.

The company's first production was the now little-known "The Tide" by Basil McDonald Hastings. Since then, the company has performed nearly 250 plays, using Harrow as a base since 1945.

Since 1990, performances have taken place at the Harrow Arts Centre and, more recently, at the Compass Theatre, Ickenham.

Over the years, Proscenium has built up a strong reputation for performing challenging plays (both classic and contemporary) to a high standard.

The company meets three times a week at the Harrow Arts Centre for rehearsals, in order that four plays are presented each season.

Social, fundraising activities and play readings take place throughout the year.

For further information on Proscenium, and to join our mailing list, please visit our web site :

<http://www.proscenium.org.uk>



Accidental Death Of An Anarchist

By Dario Fo

Translation by Simon Nye

Wednesday June 6th to Saturday June 9th 2007
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

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By Dario Fo

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Cast:

Bertozzo..... Robert Ewen
Maniac Charles Anthony
Constable Paul Davis
Inspector Keith Bayross
Superintendent Sheila Harvey
Journalist Olwen Mears

Directed by Linda Hampson

Set design Linda Hampson
Stage Manager..... Crystal Anthony
Assisted by Clare Wooster
..... John Harvey
Properties Susi Thornton
Music Lewis Lev
Sound..... Lewis Lev
Lighting Mark Sutherland

*Thanks to East Lane Theatre Company
and to Vince Eavis.*

oeuvre. His independence and clear-sightedness have led him to take great risks, whose consequences he has been made to feel while at the same time experiencing enormous responses from widely differing quarters.....

Fo's strength is in the creation of texts that simultaneously amuse, engage and provide perspectives. As in *commedia dell'arte* they are always open for creative additions and dislocations, continually encouraging the actors to improvise, which means that the audience is activated in a remarkable way. His is an oeuvre of impressive artistic vitality and range.

From Dario Fo's acceptance speech: Friends of mine have declared: 'The highest prize should be awarded to the members of the Swedish Academy for having had the courage this year to award the Nobel Prize to a Jester.' I agree. Yours is an act of courage that borders on provocation.

Ruzzanti Beolco – true father of *Commedia dell'arte* – brought on stage everyday life, joys and desperation of common people, hypocrisy and arrogance of high and mighty, incessant injustice. And they made people laugh. Laughter does not please the mighty.

It's not enough to teach a technique or style: we have to show what's happening around us. They have to be able to tell their own story. A theatre, a literature, an artistic expression that does not speak of its own time has no relevance.

Commedia dell'arte

Commedia dell'arte, comedy of the profession, means unwritten or improvised drama and relates to the manner of performance rather than to the subject matter of the play. It had a long life in Italy, probably about four hundred years (from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century); but flourished especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In practice the play was not the result of a moment's inspiration: a general outline (called the *scenario* or *canvas*) was agreed, usually involving stock characters, and there was left an opportunity for actors to heighten, vary and embellish their parts as their genius might suggest. "The actors had to find the proper words to make the tears flow or the laughter ring; they had to catch the sallies of their fellow-actors on the wing, and return them with prompt repartee. The dialogue must go like a merry game of ball or spirited sword play, with ease and without a pause." Mantzius: *History of Theatrical Art*.

An important part of every play, given always to the most expert and popular actors, were the humorous interruptions, called *lazzi*, which often had nothing to do with the play itself. It might be clever pantomime acting, acrobatic feats, juggling, or wrestling.



Luigi Calebresi

railway worker, well known as an anarchist and a pacifist opposed to individual acts of violence. After four days of interrogation in police headquarters Pinelli 'fell' out of a fourth floor window and died.

The police asserted that the anarchist's death was a suicide, that the man threw himself from a fourth floor window in despair at being found out for his crime. At the subsequent inquest, the presiding judge declared the death not a suicide but an accident. Most Italians believed that the death was the result of overly harsh interrogation

techniques, if not a case of outright murder on the part of the interrogators. There were demonstrations, articles in the press and inquiries.

In 1971 the policeman in charge of the case, Calebresi, was charged with manslaughter. Calebresi, in turn, launched a lawsuit against *Lotta Continua*, the newspaper which had exposed inconsistencies in the police version of events. In May 1972 Calebresi was assassinated in front of his house by 'unknown assailants'. Ten years later three fascists were convicted of the Milan bombings. One of them turned out to be a paid informer for the Italian police.

These are the events which inspired Dario Fo to write *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* in 1970. The play was enormously popular, and created a storm of controversy in the press and bomb threats to the theatres. It combines Fo's customary mixture of serious discussion of political issues with the traditions of *commedia dell'arte*. Its probing of issues of fascism, totalitarianism and the threats of a police state transcend the particulars of the events which inspired it.

The Nobel Prize

From the citation: With a blend of laughter and gravity he opens our eyes to abuses and injustices in society and also the historical perspectives in which they can be placed. Fo is an extremely serious satirist with a multi-faceted

The Author

Dario Fo: Playwright, director, stage and costume designer, composer. Born on 26 March 1926 in San Giano, a small town on Lago Maggiore. His father, Felice, was a socialist, station master and amateur actor; his mother, Pina Rota, a woman of great imagination and talent. He spent his childhood vacations with his maternal grandfather, who had a farm in Lomellina. Dario accompanied his grandfather travelling around the countryside selling produce from a big horse-drawn wagon. To attract customers he would tell amazing stories, inserting satirical anecdotes and news from local events. Dario listened attentively.



Dario Fo

His father was moved frequently by the railway authorities from one town to another and in each Dario would listen as the workmen in the taverns swapped tales, steeped in pungent political satire. In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize Dario recounts: 'They were the old story tellers, the master glass-blowers, who taught me and the other children the craftsmanship, the art, of spinning fantastic yarns. We would listen to them, bursting with laughter – laughter that would stick in our throats as the tragic allusions that surmounted each sarcasm would dawn on us.' Exactly the response that he wanted – and achieved – in his plays.

In 1940 the family moved to Milan. Dario began to study at the Brera Art Academy but was conscripted into the army of the Salo republic. He managed to escape and spent the last months of the war hidden in an attic room. His parents were active in the Resistance: his father organising the smuggling of Jewish scientists and escaped British prisoners-of-war into Switzerland; his mother caring for wounded partisans.

At the end of the war he attended courses in architecture at the Polytechnic, began to study theatre design and décor, and read voraciously – Gramsci,

Marx, Brecht, Mayakovsky and Lorca. Meanwhile he was an insatiable theatregoer, particularly of the *piccoli teatri*, the small theatres performing to working class audiences. He began to write monologues and sketches and in 1950 he showed his comic rendering of Cain and Abel – in which Cain is a *poer nano*, poor little thing, trying to emulate his blond, blue-eyed brother – to Franco Parenti, who invited him to join his theatre company.

He achieved a certain celebrity – and notoriety – in 1951-2 with a series of 18 monologues called *cocorico* in the *poer nano* style which subverted Biblical and Shakespearean themes, until the authorities realised the social and political satire and cancelled them.

In 1952 he met Franca Rame and they married two years later. Franca came from a travelling theatre family, steeped in the traditions of Commedia dell'Arte and taking plays with a strong socialist and anti-clerical message to small towns and villages, contributing any profits to support striking workers and provide child-care facilities. Dario and Franca moved to Rome, working together in films and theatre, until in 1959 they set up the Fo-Rame company: writing material together, Dario as director and designer and Franca as principle actor and administrator. The company toured extensively with farces satirising the corruption in Italian politics (which led to a number of law-suits and a ban from appearing on Italian radio). They had their first success in 1960 with *Archangels Don't Play Pinball*, translated into



Franca Rame and Dario Fo

a number of European languages but it led to theatres being attacked by fascist groups.

In 1968 they set up a new independent theatre collective, *Associazione Nuova Scena*, which began performing in workers' community halls, sports arenas and town squares carrying with them Dario's specially designed foldable stage. Eventually

“Dario Fo, who emulates the jesters of the Middle Ages in scourging authority and upholding the dignity of the downtrodden”

1997 Nobel Prize Citation

they turned an abandoned factory in Milan into a base theatre. When Soviet forces crushed the Prague spring Fo withdrew all rights to perform their plays in Czechoslovakia – and the plays were banned throughout the Soviet block.

In the 1970s Fo-Rame set up a new *Collectivo Teatrale La Commune*, taking over an abandoned market building in Milan and writing and performing

Accidental Death of an Anarchist, *Fedayin* (about the volatile situation in Palestine and featuring PLO members in the cast) and *Can't Pay? Won't Pay!* During this time Franca was kidnapped and tortured by a Fascist gang and Dario was arrested when he tried to prevent police from closing his play about the murder of Salvador Allende. In 1976 he was invited to do a version of *Mistero Buffo* (his adaption of Mediaeval mystery plays)

on TV, which the Vatican condemned as blasphemous.

Throughout the 1980s and 90s his international reputation grew. When he was refused a visa by the American authorities, US writers protested and he was able to tour productions in Harvard, Washington and New York. In 1997 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Both Dario and Franca remain politically active. In 2006 he ran, unsuccessfully, for mayor of Milan, supported by the Communist Refoundation Party and receiving 20% of the vote. In the same year Franca was elected senator for the Italy of Values Party. And just last month, when the Vatican described a satirical comedian as a terrorist, Dario sprang to his defence: 'It is Stalinist to brand anyone who speaks the truth as a terrorist.'

The Play

On December 12 1969 a bomb went off in the Agricultural Bank in Milan killing 17 people and injuring nearly 100. Immediately after the bombing, fascists of the Italian Social Movement (MSI) distributed leaflets denouncing the 'red terror' and the police arrested a number of socialist, communist and anarchist activists in the city. One of these was Giuseppe Pinelli, a



Giuseppe Pinelli