

# PLAYS

## INTERNATIONAL & EUROPE



**Rupert Goold,  
Director Nonpareil  
interviewed by  
Jeremy Malies P14**

**Neil Dowden on  
London Theatre Online  
P12**

**Julie Sorokurs on  
Digital Theatre  
P30**

**PLUS**

THEATRE'S RESPONSE TO PANDEMIC  
IN LONDON, UK, EUROPE, USA;  
DALE ROOKS INTERVIEW;  
STUDIO D'ASNIÈRES IN PARIS;  
AUSTRALIAN THEATRE IN  
20TH CENTURY;  
ADELAIDE FESTIVAL;  
& PRE-SHUTDOWN  
REVIEWS

# Features



*Rupert Goold, Director Nonpareil. Rupert Goold burst into prominence when artistic director of Headlong. Now he is artistic director at the Almeida Theatre, London. Jeremy Malies talks to Goold about his career and plans.*

*Photo: Chris McAndrew.*

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*London Theatre Online: Neil Dowden describes how London theatres will never say die.*

*Neil Dowden. Photo: David Best.*

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*Digital Theatre from Cambridge, Anywhere: Julie Sorokurs asks how palatable on-line performance can be.*

*Julie Sorokurs. Photo: courtesy of author.*

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by Mihai Mănișțiu

## FRONT COVER:

Jennifer Saunders as Madame Arcati in the 1941 play by Noël Coward *Blithe Spirit*, at the Duke of York's Theatre.

Photo: Nobby Clark.

Read the review on page 10.

# The Studio d'Asnières in Paris: A Theatre and a Theatre School

*Hervé van der Meulen has been the head of the acting programme and director of the Studio d'Asnières since its inception in 1993 and has been instrumental in turning the Studio d'Asnières actor-training school into one of the most valued educational institutions for French actors and theatre makers. About to retire, van der Meulen chose to have his students produce in spring 2020 La Maison d'os by Roland Dubillard as his swan song; in it he plays the role of the "Maître", the rich boss who is dying in his own immense home even while his servants, valets, doctors, and cooks continue to serve him impeccably but with utter indifference to his fate. It is the perfect choice to conclude a career as teacher, actor, and visionary, for van der Meulen's trajectory resembles that of the "Maître" indeed – not in the morbid sense at all, but in that he is fading from the scene: the studio theatre that has been his home for decades.*

*Fate decided to meddle with the symmetry. La Maison d'os by Roland Dubillard, directed by Hervé van der Meulen and created in Théâtre Montansier de Versailles in February had a shortened run. Because of the Corona pandemic, the production closed before the French theatre critic Gilles Costaz, who had agreed to review the show for Plays International & Europe, was scheduled to see it. La Maison d'os will again be presented whenever theatres are permitted to re-open in the Paris region, but meanwhile Plays International & Europe offers you a dossier giving information about the Studio d'Asnières acting school and its director.*

*In the email-conducted interview below, Hervé van der Meulen discusses how and why he chose to have his company of young actors stage La Maison d'os.*

## An interview with Hervé van der Meulen, director of the Studio d'Asnières based on discussions and emails with Dana Rufolo

### **Why did you choose to produce an absurdist play, especially by an author who is relatively unknown, at least outside of France?**

Already in high-school (*lycée*) and then as an actor and a director, I often came into contact with plays from the second half of the twentieth century that are classified as "Theatre of the Absurd". These plays in fact are the logical continuum of vaudeville – plays like those of Eugène Labiche and Georges Feydeau (who by the way was also a confirmed actor) – and the surrealists (starting with Guillaume Apollinaire and his *Mamelles de Tirésias* (*The Breasts of Tiresias*) and Michel de Ghelderode up to André Breton and Philippe Soupault. Above all, I was extremely familiar with the plays of Eugène Ionesco. I've directed the diptych *Jacques ou la Soumission* (*Jacques or The Submission*) and *L'avenir est dans les œufs* (*The Future is in Eggs*), and that incredible piece *Jeux de Massacre* (*Killing Game*). But also you have to include as absurdist Roger Vitrac, Samuel Beckett, and Jean Tardieu... I've also found these newer dramatic forms fascinating.

### **But what is it specifically about absurdist drama that has convinced you that your acting students should be exposed to works of this genre?**

I adore how the absurdist address both the meaninglessness of existence and the incongruity of death while at the same time upending all the traditional dramatic forms and making use of a language that is precise and funny but also very rich, highly poetic.

I love words, words juxtaposed to create unexpected or bizarre phrases, and it has been my goal to convince the future generation of actors – since I am lucky to introduce them to the dramatic arts – that this period of our French theatrical history and these authors are important, especially because I recognize that these authors are far from contemporary preoccupations and the reality of today's everyday life.

I've read *La Maison d'os* by Roland Dubillard (1962) many

times. In my opinion it is his best work. It gathers together all the dramaturgical and linguistic reasons for working with absurdist drama that I mentioned earlier. And it is marked with the anxiety characteristic of this author; one sees it in his *Diablogues*.

Additionally, staging this work now permits me to introduce some humour while also capturing the anxiety I feel about my upcoming departure from Studio d'Asnières.



*Hervé van der Meulen in La Maison d'os.  
Photo: Laurencine Lot.*

### **That is understandable. Laurencine Lot, who provided the photos for this article, told me that you are greatly admired in France for having devoted your entire professional life to promoting the drama school that you founded. It must be difficult to imagine your days apart from the school and its stage performances.**

Well, it is understandable, yes, after being twenty eight years in this house along with Jean-Louis Martin-Barbaz, and after having developed – especially with the help of the new team that will be led from here on out by Tatiana Breidi and Paul Desveaux – the only *Ecole Supérieure française d'Art Dramatique* where young actors and actresses are receiving training in their future profession while being paid and totally integrated into the professional life of a theatre company. It was important to do something noteworthy to signal my retirement as director. I felt I had to find a play that could be put on stage easily with a role for myself as the older one and enough roles for all the younger

artists. A work that reveals how ephemeral our lives are and that is up to the standards of the professional project that we always undertake at this time of the year. And also that references the place where one lives and works – here the office is the Studio Theatre – and that captures the essence of the professional goals that I attempted to achieve during many years now. And I found the answer in this play. However emotional I feel about the subject of departing, it also permits me to poke fun at myself.

**You'd think that *La Maison d'os* was written especially for you and your company of young actors!**

Certainly *La Maison d'os* was the ideal choice. It satisfied all the criteria. And I wasn't once disappointed, beginning with the rehearsals as well as during the productions at the Théâtre Montansier de Versailles and during the premieres at Studio-Théâtre d'Asnières – which were unfortunately cut short by the coronavirus pandemic.

**Will you be staging *Maison d'os* again, to compensate for its short run?**

We'll resume the show at Asnières in the upcoming season. The actors won't have graduated yet, and I am still around and looking forward to playing the magnificent role of the big boss again.

I'm especially happy that the troupe of actors playing with me are very talented and promising, so we are able to do justice to this *chef-d'œuvre* by Roland Dubillard. I feel this author has been unjustly ignored, and it would seem others share my opinion, at least judging by the critiques that came in before we shut down. Dubillard was praised for his originality and for the impact of his theatrical instinct.

Translated from the French by Dana Rufolo.

## Le Studio d'Asnières: Theatre School and Theatre

Le Studio d'Asnières has been housed at Asnières-sur-Seine in the greater Parisian area since 1993 and is officially recognized by the French Ministry of Culture. Plays are put on there, and also it is a theatre school providing training in the theatre arts and, unusually, making sure that their students are integrated into the ranks of professional theatre practitioners. Presently the artistic director is Hervé Van der Meulen, but in the autumn it will be the current deputy director Tatiana Breidi and acting director Paul Desveaux who will take over the helm.

The Studio's productions are large works that involve the entire troupe of actor students; the repertoire is of both classical and contemporary plays, and dance and music can be a significant part of the performance. A recent example is *Rabelais* by Jean-Louis Barrault which is scheduled to play in Paris at Théâtre 13 Jardin after the pandemic shutdown, as well as *La Maison d'os* (*The House of Bones*) by Roland Dubillard, initially scheduled to open spring 2020, as you can read above. For many years now, these performances have been co-produced with the Théâtre

Montansier in Versailles.

The Studio shares its space with emerging companies founded by its former students and also with partner companies that are in residence. Additionally, the Studio maintains a significant cultural outreach program in the form of readings, workshops, and meet-ups.

In 1993, the Studio d'Asnières created a high-level professional school for training in the dramatic arts. It quickly moved to the forefront, and as of September 2014, the Ministry of Culture authorized the Studio to award graduates the *Diplôme National Supérieur Professionnel de Comédien*, a Bachelor's degree, thereby acquiring the official title of *École Supérieure de Comédiens par l'Alternance (ESCA) du Studio d'Asnières* (Higher School of Comedians through the Work-study program (ESCA) of the Studio of Asnières). It is one of the twelve higher schools of dramatic art in France.

The Studio's work-study program is the only one of its kind in France. Students alternate between taking courses and working within the professional milieu, for which they are paid. The work-study training in dramatic art set up and developed by *Le Studio d'Asnières* within the *École Supérieure de Comédiens par l'Alternance* is a pioneering idea. It develops an immediate understanding of the reality of work while encouraging the creativity and vision of the young artists being trained.

Material from Le Studio d'Asnières has been translated from the French by Dana Rufolo.

For more information, contact the editor at [TRIEu@gmail.com](mailto:TRIEu@gmail.com)

Hervé van der Meulen and cast in *La Maison d'os*.  
Photo: Laurencine Lot.

