

MISTERO BUFFO

Education Resource Pack

Complied By: Emma Churchland

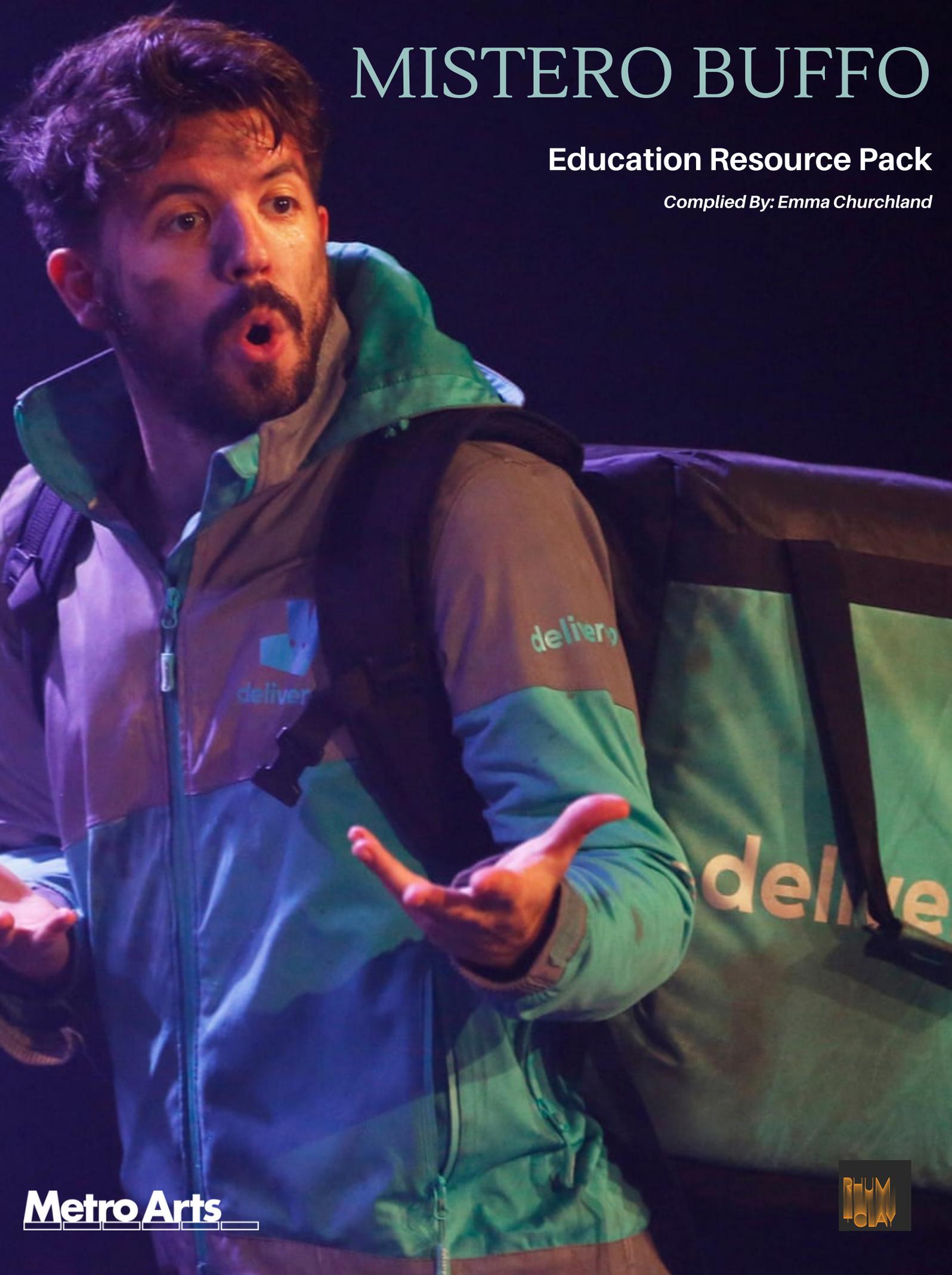


Table of Contents

3. About Rhum and Clay

4. Mistero Buffo Overview

5. Curriculum Connections

- Purpose, Context and Text
- Inquiry Questions
- Dramatic Forms and Style
- Themes
- Elements of Drama

6. Who is Dario Fo?

7. The History of Mistero Buffo

8. Rhum and Clay's Mistero Buffo

9. The Role of The Jongleur

10. Pre-show Activities: Script Excerpt - "The Birth of Jongleur"

11. Post-show Activities

12. References and Other Sources of Interest

13. For Your Information

About Rhum and Clay

Rhum and Clay is led by two co-Artistic Directors, Julian Spooner and Matt Wells.

The company's work is always devised and physically virtuosic. Productions are cinematic in the telling, playing with overlapping narratives, with flashbacks and montages that cumulatively create artful, visually textured on-stage worlds.

Rhum and Clay works with an ever-changing and extraordinary range of creative collaborators, most recently on *The War of the Worlds*, with writer Isley Lynn (*Skin a Cat*), award-winning sound, set and lighting designers Ben Grant, Bethany Wells, Nick Flintoff and Pete Maxey and director Hamish MacDougall (*Kandinsky Theatre Company*).

Over the past decade the company has created nine productions that have toured at home and abroad with their 2017 production of *Testosterone* and this production of *Mistero Buffo* playing to audiences in Brazil, Canada, Kazakhstan, France and Venezuela in the eighteen months prior to lockdown.

The company is based in London at the New Diorama Theatre, where they are an Associate Ensemble, and is the recipient of numerous awards.

'Rhum and Clay':

Theatre that embraces the **magical**, the **comical** and the **intoxicating**, but is willing to scabble in the earth and the dirt where the real stories are to be found; excavating for the urgent, the complicated and the beautiful.

Mistero Buffo Overview

SYNOPSIS:

Mistero Buffo is considered to be one of the most iconic solo roles of all time and, from its publication, swiftly became Dario Fo's most revered and also most controversial play.

Banned for many years by the Vatican for blasphemy, *Mistero Buffo* pulls biblical themes and apocryphal stories into a fabulously funny and deeply subversive satire on power and control.

The solo performer at the centre of the play is drawn from the tradition of the Jongleur: the travelling performer, acrobat and comedian of the Middle Ages. The lightning rod for all the anger and disrespect felt by ordinary people towards their rulers, jongleurs roamed the land bringing the latest news and poking fun at those responsible for all the injustice and hardship and misrule that they encountered. Unsurprisingly, they made enemies of the most powerful. *Mistero Buffo* revives this agitator, this rebel, this truth-teller at a time when we need them most.

With culture wars driving division and distrust within communities and a pandemic that has served to highlight the vast economic inequalities at the heart of society, can a 21st century Jongleur help unite us through laughter and a little righteous anger? Our travelling storyteller is a Deliveroo worker at the centre of the gig economy, gathering and sharing his stories as he rushes from place to place, barely catching his breath.

Winning The Stage's Award for Best Performance, Rhum and Clay's *Mistero Buffo* is a tour-de-force. An extraordinary, virtuosic romp through a hundred characters and locations in the person of one man. Critically acclaimed, this production has now been adapted to work in outdoor as well as indoor spaces. It seems particularly apt, since this was often where Dario Fo himself performed it: in town squares, in car factories, in football stadiums. This is storytelling at its finest and most accessible; the Jongleur goes wherever the people gather.

Mistero Buffo Overview

DATES: Wednesday 14th - Saturday 17th September 2022

SHOW TIME: 7:30 PM **DURATION:** 90 minutes **AGE SUITABILITY:** Grades 10 - 12

CREATIVE TEAM:

Written by **Dario Fo**
Translated by **Ed Emery**
Additional Writing by **Nicolas Pitt & Julian Spooner**

Directed by **Nicolas Pitt**
Performed by **Julian Spooner**
Lighting Design **Geoff Hense**
Sound Design **Jonathan Ouin**
Costume Design **Emily Bates**
Produced by **Rhum and Clay Theatre Company**

WARNINGS:

Course Language, References to rape, suicide, and murder. Technical effects such as loud music and sound effects, bright lights, flashing, and haze.

Solo Physical Performance Workshop

DATE: Saturday 17th September 2022 **TIME:** 1:00 PM **DURATION:** 3 Hours

Rhum and Clay take you on a step by step journey towards developing a dynamic and cinematic solo performance style.

Drawing on their training at Ecole Jacques Lecoq and the methodology employed in The Stage Award-winning *Mistero Buffo*, expect to learn techniques which will allow you to

- embody multiple characters
- change physical space in the blink of an eye
- cultivate a rich and diverse theatrical world using just your body.

We will start with movement analysis focusing on the some of the 20 movements to examine how we can use rhythm, tempo and the dynamics of movement to aid physical storytelling.

We then learn a solo storytelling routine, which is inspired by the techniques of cinema and enables the physical solo performer to change space and character instantaneously.

The workshop culminates in the participants recreating an iconic scene or moment from cinema as a solo performer.

Curriculum Connections

Purpose, Context and Text

PURPOSE

- To Empower
- To Entertain
- To Educate
- To Challenge

CONTEXTS

- Dramatic
- Philosophical
- Sociological
- Historical
- Cultural
- Political

TEXT FORM

- Hybridity of storytelling through
- Scripted
- Devised
- Physical theatre
- Non-linear

Inquiry Questions

- How can we use drama to celebrate, document, empower and share understandings of the human experience?
- How can drama help to educate, challenge, and empower us to question society at this time and advocate change?
- How can drama reshape and transform meaning of inherited texts through skills of drama, including devising, directing, and acting?

Dramatic Forms and Style

STORYTELLING

A re-telling of the stories of Jesus by the Jongleur using language, vocalisation, physical movement and gesture to reveal the elements and images of the story.

CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEATRE (THEATRE OF SOCIAL COMMENT)

Mistero Buffo is a strong example of Contemporary Political Theatre. The production draws on inherited theatrical traditions such as Epic Theatre and Theatre of the Absurd to cast light on the contemporary condition. Contemporary Political Theatre is characterised by blurring the boundaries of form and style to create dramatic action and meaning.

This production is a hybridity of style, drawing on conventions from inherited theatrical traditions combined with conventions such as;

- intertextuality
- parody

to comment on the treatment of the Jongleur, the religious stories told and the hidden 'truth' behind these stories.

EPIC THEATRE

The production uses conventions such as;

- narration
- didacticism

to challenge the audience's understanding of humanity, to question society, and advocate for change.

THEMES

- Organised Religion
- Truth
- Grief
- Direct address
- Multiple roles
- Satire
- Reversal of normal order
- Redemption
- Morality
- Mortality

Elements of Drama

ROLE AND CHARACTER

As the production is only performed by one actor, the actor plays multiple roles throughout. The performer adopts the values, attitudes, status, and motivations of the role, whilst quickly shifting from role to role. The performer transforms into various archetypal roles such as a;

- Lord
- Lawyer
- Wife
- Soldier
- Drunk
- Townsperson

as well as the delivery driver, a modern-day role in everyday society.

The performer also plays various characters, adopting personas, physicality, vocal qualities and given circumstances of characters such as Jesus, the Jongleur and Madonna.

SYMBOL

Associations that occur when something is used to represent something else to reinforce or extend dramatic meaning. A reoccurring symbol within this work is an orange tree, as well as oranges.

MOVEMENT

Given this production is performed by one actor, movement is employed throughout the whole production to communicate meaning by using the whole body and performing various movements with varying levels of energy to convey role, character, time, and place.

PLACE AND SPACE

As the actor moves through various stories, place and space are depicted through sound and lighting design, directorial choices, and the skills of the performer.

Who is Dario Fo?

"Fo had succeeded in his aim of making of the theatre 'a great machine which makes people laugh at dramatic things... In the laughter there remains a sediment of anger."

– Sturt Hood

Dario Fo, (born March 24, 1926—died October 13, 2016), Italian avant-garde playwright, manager-director, and actor-mime who often faced government censure as a theatrical caricaturist with a flair for social agitation.

Fo's first theatrical experience was collaborating on satirical revues for small cabarets and theatres. He and his wife, the actress Franca Rame, produced humorous sketches on the television show *Canzonissima* that soon made them popular public personalities. They founded the theatre companies Campagna Dario Fo–Franca Rame (1958), Nuova Scena (1968), and Collettivo Teatrale La Comune (1970), developing an agitprop theatre of politics, often blasphemous and scatological but rooted in the tradition of commedia dell'arte and blended with what Fo called "unofficial leftism." With the latter troupe they began to tour factories, parks, and gymnasiums.

Fo encourages directors and translators to modify his plays as they see fit, as he finds this in accordance with the commedia dell'arte tradition of on-stage improvisation. Upon awarding him the 1997 Nobel Prize in Literature, the committee highlighted Fo as a writer "who emulates the jesters of the Middle Ages in scourging authority and upholding the dignity of the downtrodden."



(Source: The Guardian)

"I do the same thing as a clown. I just put some drops of absurdity in this calm and tranquil liquid which is society, and the reactions reveal things that were hidden before the absurdity brought them into the open."

– Dario Fo

The History of Mistero Buffo

Described as 'an imaginary Esperanto of the poor and disinherited' Dario Fo's solo performance of *Mistero Buffo* ("Comical Mystery Play") first opened to audiences in 1969 and was performed across Europe, Canada and Latin America. Recognised as one of the most controversial and popular spectacles in post-war European theatre, described as "the most blasphemous show in the history of television."

The play is a series of monologues with Biblical themes and popular details of the life of Christ. The performance texts are a combination of Italian and various dialects of regional Italy. The text originates in the surviving texts and descriptions of the *giullare*; the travelling jesters of medieval times who would travel to towns and villages, bringing the latest news. It bears the marks of the left-wing radicalism, the subversion of accepted wisdom and the challenging of entrenched authorities, which throughout Europe inspired the student movement and was accompanied, particularly in Italy, by large-scale strikes and working-class demonstrations.



(Source: Nuovo Teatro)

"Fo's text seeks to reclaim some of the materials and artistic strategies of the medieval players from centuries of scorn and mystification. This loosely structured text strings together a variety of stories and songs drawn from diverse traditional sources. These are interspersed with Fo's satirical comments, analytical speeches and sacrilegious jokes. In performing it, Fo adapted it to new situations, adding new materials and contemporary political reference." – The Wire.

The show itself has been watched by 40 million people across the world and translated into 30 different languages. If the performance was ever shown outside of Italy, it would often be modified to reflect local political and social issues.

Rhum and Clay's Mistero Buffo

TRAILER:

<https://youtu.be/dYewM0Bh8kQb>

AUDIENCE RESPONSES:

"Mistero Buffo is a fantastic piece of work all round. It's a timely re-imagining of, and response to, the original by Dario Fo. It's a stunning individual performance, full of expert comic timing and captivating throughout"

"I was really excited by the way they have top-and-tailed Fo's text; totally in the author's spirit, editing and embellishing it to make it feel entirely contemporary and properly political. It's very tightly directed and it contains the single best performance I've seen in a while"

LINKS TO REVIEWS:

The Guardian -

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/aug/10/mistero-buffo-review-chameleonic-solo-romp-through-reimagined-bible-tales>

Total Theatre - <http://totaltheatre.org.uk/rhum-and-clay-mistero-buffo/>

Whats On Stage - https://www.whatsonstage.com/edinburgh-theatre/reviews/mistero-buffo-underbelly-fringe-festival_47361.html



FROM THE DIRECTOR:

*"We have both wanted to do *Mistero Buffo* together for about ten years, not only for the challenge it sets a solo performer but because it is a text that will always be relevant. It isn't an attack on faith or religion but on power structures that use stories and interpretation to control how we think and live our lives. Therefore, when we approached it at the end of 2017, finding "our Jongleur" storyteller was always going to be key. The figure of the industrial worker that Fo was writing for may have faded but has been replaced by a generation of disenfranchised gig economy workers who are told to feel grateful for their 'freedom'."*

-Nicolas Pitt

FOR STUDENTS:

In your own words, create a synopsis of *Mistero Buffo*.

- What predictions can you make about how the production will be staged?
- What predictions can you make about the directorial and design choices?
- What questions do you have about the production itself?

The Role of the Jongleur

Historically, the Jongleur is known as travelling medieval entertainer, proficient in juggling, acrobatics, music and recitation. The Jongleur used to turn up in the streets of the town and reveal to the people their own condition – exposing the “truth” about those in power, and the human condition. In essence, they functioned as a sort of walking newspaper, passing on gossip and news to each town. Because of this, Jongleurs were sometimes killed for sharing information that those in power did not wish to be shared. To the Lords and Nobles, Jongleurs were viewed as vagabonds and lived on the fringes of society.

“The stories of Jesus, created by people like you and I, sharing his journey, were banned. The Jongleurs that shared them were arrested and burned at the stake.”

- The Jongleur, Mistero Buffo



(Source: Kids Britannica)



(Source: Medieval Chronicals)

The Role of the Jongleur

At the beginning of *Mistero Buffo*, we are introduced to a Jongleur who performs the various stories involving Jesus Christ and other well-known Christian figures. The role of the Jongleur has been contemporised to be performed as a Deliveroo driver.

Question for students:

Why do you think the Jongleur is a Deliveroo driver in this modern-day version? Consider the types of people to work in this sort of job and who they represent in modern day society.



Pre-show Activities

The Birth of the Jongleur

Below is a script excerpt from Mistero Buffo.

An extended version has been included [here](#) or in the reference list should you wish to use it.

JONGLEUR

I was not born a jongleur; I didn't suddenly turn up as I am now, with a sudden gust from the skies and, hopla, there I was: 'Good day... Hello'. No! I am the result of a miracle! A miracle which was carried out on me. Do you believe me? This is how it came about! I was born a peasant. A peasant? Yes, a real countryman. I was happy, I was sad, I had no land. No! I worked as all of us work in these valleys, wherever I could. And one day I came by a mountain, a mountain all of rock. It was nobody's. I found that out. I asked people. 'No! Nobody wants this mountain!'

Well, I went up to its peak, and I scratched with my nails, and I saw that there was a little bit of earth there, and I saw that there was a little trickle of water coming down. So I began to scratch further. I went down to the riverbank, and I wore my fingers to the bone bringing earth up onto this mountain. And my children and my wife were there. My wife is sweet, sweet and fair, with two round breasts, and a gentle way of walking that reminds you of a heifer as she moves. Oh, she is beautiful! I love her, and it gives me pleasure to speak of her.

Anyway, I carried earth up in my own hands, and the grass grew so fast! Pfff... ! It grew of its own accord. You've no idea how beautiful it was! It was like gold dust! I would stick in my hoe, and pfff... a tree sprang forth. That earth was a miracle! A marvel! There were poplars, oaks and other trees everywhere. I sowed them when the moon was right; I knew what had to be done, and there, sweet, fine, handsome crops grew. There was chicory, thistles, beans, turnips, there was everything. For me, for us!

Activities using the script excerpt:

1. Read through the script excerpt and answer the following questions:

- What is this moment introducing?
- What do we know about the Jongleur?
- What questions do you have about the Jongleur?

2. In groups, take turns in staging this moment.

Consider the following:

- Based on what you know of the Jongleur, what skills of the performers are required to effectively portray the Jongleur?
- What does the performer's physicality need to look like?
- How would the performer use vocal dynamics shape their characterisation?
- What kind of energy is required to effectively convey character?

Discuss the following script excerpts:

Does that mean everything we believe is real? If we believe in it, does it become real? For something to be real, do we all have to collectively believe in it?

– The Jongleur

What happens when we believe in one man's crazy vision of the world?

– The Jongleur

The stories you're about to hear do not conform to the accepted version of the truth. They don't conform to what those in power want them to say, what they want people to believe in

– The Jongleur

- What do you think the Jongleur is referring to in these statements?
- What do you predict the purpose of this performance is? I.e. To entertain, to educate, etc.
- What does it mean by "Accepted version of the truth"?

Throughout this performance, the Jongleur performs the following stories:

- Herod's Massacre
- The Slaughter of the Innocents
- The Wedding of Cana
- The Resurrection of Lazarus
- Jesus' Crucifixion

Students should research these stories and ensure they are familiar with each of these stories by answering the following questions:

- Provide a brief overview of the story
- What is the purpose of these stories? Why do you believe they are important to Christians?
- Does the story have a message? If so, what is it?

Post-show Activities



Recall the stories of “Herod’s Massacre” and “The Slaughter of the Innocents” (pictured above)

1. What **elements of drama** were manipulated to create dramatic action?
2. Which **conventions** were used and how did their manipulation create dramatic meaning?
3. Choose two characters performed during this moment. Describe the actor’s physicality, vocal choices, and energy. Were the actor’s choices effective in conveying character and overall, dramatic meaning?

Using your responses from questions 1-3, write a paragraph responding to the following question:

Does Julian Spooner (who plays the Jongleur) effectively depict the stories of “Herod’s Massacre” and “The Slaughter of Innocents”? Discuss how effective the elements of drama and conventions were manipulated to convey dramatic meaning, using descriptive evidence.

Repeat this activity using the other stories included in *Mistero Buffo*. Work in groups to accurately recall the blocking in each story.

References and other Sources of Interest

Biography of Dario Fo:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dario-Fo#ref45911>

Dario Fo: World Theatre Day: https://www.world-theatre-day.org/dario_fo.html#:~:text=His%20dramatic%20work%20employs%20comedic,conflict%20in%20the%20Middle%20East

Dario Fo's Politics of Subversive Language: <https://thewire.in/the-arts/dario-fos-politics-absurdist-laughter>

Mistero Buffo, translate by Ed Emery:

<http://www.geocities.ws/dariofoarchive/mistero.html>

Mistero Buffo: Rhum and Clay Productions:

<https://rhumandclay.com/productions/current/mistero-buffo>

Performance of Mistero Buffo by Dario Fo (in Italian):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EdIFECzTVE>

QCAA General Senior Syllabus (2019) Version 1.1:

<https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/senior/senior-arts/drama/syllabus>

The Birth of the Jongleur, Mistero Buffo, translated by Ed Emery:

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1997/8613-prose-1997-2/>

The History of the Jongleur: <https://www.medieval-life-and-times.info/medieval-music/jongleurs.htm>

For Your Information

- Doors open 20 minutes prior to performance.
- Please brief your students about appropriate theatre etiquette before seeing the play. Due to the nature of the theatre configuration the students can be seen and heard by both the actors and fellow audience members.
- With this in mind, students are asked **not** to use notebooks during the show as it distracts the artist and detracts from their experience.
- Photography and filming of the production is strictly prohibited due to copyright.
- Please ask your students to switch off their mobile phones inside the theatre. We also ask that all patrons refrain from taking food and drink into the theatre.
- Please do not bring school bags into the foyer and theatre.
- Please arrive at least 30 minutes prior to the show starting. If you are running late please call Box Office on 07 3002 7100 and let them know .

About the Venue

Metro Arts is developing the future of Australian contemporary arts practice, now.

Championing all contemporary art forms, the two core activities of the organisation are developing and co-presenting contemporary arts.

Within Metro Arts' multiple venues, there are artists taking risks, creating, developing, experimenting, and presenting ambitious contemporary art. In addition to the artistic program Metro Arts supports the wider artistic community with low cost short and long term venue hire for creative businesses, photo shoots, rehearsals, exhibitions, performances, auditions, forums, celebrations and more.

LOCATION: 97 Boundary Street, West End, QLD 4101