

# The Ormond Chronicle 1969

*Editors:*

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## UBU – by Alfred Jarry



This year's College play was presented with one thought in mind – that it should be an event in which the entire College could participate. Too often student theatre becomes a dry intellectualistic exercise: a forum for 'talented' people to play at acting. And too often the plays attempted should be left to the expertise of professionals. College plays especially run the risk of becoming formalistic shells enclosing all too little talent. We did not attempt to present an ideal version of Ubu. Rather we made the event out of the sum total of available skills.

The basic format of Ubu was conceived

when the Melbourne Theatre Company was visiting Perth in February with Shakespeare's Henry IV. Graeme Blundell and Geoff Milne, later to become producer and translator/designer for Ormond, were members of this Company. Milne, a graduate in French from Perth University, stopped talking about Ron and the boys at Carlton long enough to interest Blundell in the possibility of a college version of the Ubu plays of Alfred Jarry. The ultimate sub-title of Ubu, 'The Exploits of a Gross Fat Man' indicated the influence of Frank Thring's playing of Sir John Falstaff, Shakespeare's memorable scoundrel in 'Henry'. This character, along with Rabelais' Gargantua

and perhaps a well-known Victorian politician, provided the main ingredients for Ubu.

On his return from Perth, Blundell was appointed producer of the College play; he agreed to direct Milne's translation of Ubu. It was at this point that the Ormond/Women's play began to conform to recent trends in contemporary theatre.

Blundell and Milne were conducting workshops at La Mama aiming at creating actors with sufficiently flexible techniques to cope with so-called environmental theatre; that is, a style of theatre capable of being realized in a variety of venues — church halls, parking lots, street corners and the like. They transposed these workshops to Ormond to provide training for another environment; University College theatre. The main aims were to cultivate the players' intrinsic talents, develop spontaneity, and, through improvizations, impart a collegiate ethos to the text of the play. The corporate sense of the undertaking was also stressed, and no person who attended workshops consistently was excluded from the play.

The producer cast the roles from workshop observations. Because of space considerations, I deal primarily with Ormond representatives. John Duigan was the natural choice for King Ubu. Not only was he more than sufficiently talented for the role, but also possessed the



stamina necessary to survive being on stage for 2½ hours each performance. He has since made frequent appearances at La Mama. Ben Boer gave an elegant rendition of Captain Bordure — an apparent outcast from 'The Student Prince'. Milne enhanced the previously minor roles of Ubu's henchmen — the Palcontents. In our production they were played by Graeme Johansen, Evan John and Chris Warner. The last named, along with Denis Wilson, has since been gaining experience at La Mama. The highlight of the zany Wilson performance, was the song which began the second half. This was originally written by Jarry for a puppet version of Ubu. Rosemary Brown played the inelegant but amusing part, Mother Ubu.

John a'Beckett gave a finely controlled performance as Prince Bougreas, the 14 year old on the threshold of having problems with women. In sterling performances of King Wenceslas and Czar Alexis, Jim Mitchell clearly demonstrated the reasons for the collapse of the Eastern monarchies. The present writer was cast as Prophaiser de 'Pataphysique. Owing to his ignorance of the French Language he never discovered what the role actually entailed.

Ubu provided opportunities for a great deal of multiple role playing. Peter Lindsay quick changed himself through five roles — ranging from Noble to Peasant. Although appearing in other guises, Graeme Dandy will be best remembered for his playing of the somewhat bewildered General Laski. Brian Nottle, Jane Fordyce, Karyn Small and Margaret Somerville filled other dual roles. The rest of the Ubuist nobility and bureaucracy were played by Diane Boehme, Melanie Magee, John Price and Sam Ricketson. Gordon Sutherland and John Picot appeared in other supporting roles.

Paul Sheahan and Wayne Jonas were the two-strong army of Noland. By an oversight Jarry omitted to include a Keeper of the King's Tankard called Fearless. Our production rectified this omission. John Philbrick appeared to be a not inappropriate player for the part. The Ormond/Women's choir sang their way out of the hearts of millions. Other music was provided by A Semblance of Dignity. The organist of this group, Janet Laurie, composed new settings for Jarry's songs.

The brunt of the back-stage work was borne

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by Ian Borthwick ('tireless in defence as Milne would say') and the very promising Greg Johnson. David Pollard and Gordon Sutherland took the photos. Philip Griffiths handled publicity and Geoff Hadwen organized the ticket sales.

Lorraine Taylor was Chairwoman, stage manager and mother of us all.

Ubu was designed to be relaxed and spontaneous. Some of the memorable moments were completely unplanned. Graeme Dandy pausing amid his lines to thank a solitary laughter in the audience – namely producer Blundell. John McCaughey's one night stand as spinet accompanist to the Bougrelas/Kate

scene. The disruption of the final performance by that vigilant preserver of social purity – John Price. A magnificent Borzoi hound known familiarly as Sandra, who could not take the stage on the final night owing to an impending nervous breakdown. John Philbrick's alterations to his lines in the final performance.

Most of these players will return to College in 1970. The enthusiasm engendered by Ubu will ensure the presentation of another vigorous and bright play. The spirit of our contribution to University theatre will remain the same: to exploit our talents to the full, and to provide an entertaining occasion for the entire College.

**Charles Kemp**