



Bruiser Theatre Company

‘Low Pay? Don’t Pay!’

By Dario Fo. Translated by Joseph Farrell All-Ireland and Scotland Premiere Touring Autumn 2010

"I think I'll go in for this type of shopping every day. Not just because I didn't pay for it, but because, all of a sudden, we were all in it together, men and women, and it felt right. We stood up to them!"

An uproarious new 2010 translation of Dario Fo's frenetic farce, "Can't Pay? Won't Pay", which, although set in Italy, has an all too familiar ring to it.

Bruiser is delighted to be presenting the Northern Ireland, Republic Of Ireland and Scotland Premiere of this new version.

Housewives, Antonia and Margherita, fed up with high prices in the supermarket, take matters into their own hands and start shoplifting. Keen to keep their light-fingered antics from their husbands, Giovanni and Luigi - not to mention the police - the women are forced to resort to more and more inventive hiding places and more and more elaborate cover stories, in this legendary comedy.

“Low Pay? Don't Pay!” mingles agit-prop politics, linguistic provocation and stage techniques harking back to the Italian Commedia Dell'Arte, to create a great comic fresco of a society on the verge of madness. Fo emulates the jesters of the middle ages, scourging authority and upholding the dignity of the downtrodden. With a blend of laughter and gravity, he opens our eyes to abuses and injustices in society, and also the wider historical perspective in which they can be placed. Matched with Bruiser's anarchic, energetic physical humour and playful approach to text, this production promises a rollickingly good night out, leaving audiences rolling in the aisles. A sure fire hit!

"Farce at its finest...simply glorious"
The Stage on 'Can't Pay? Won't Pay!'

PROLOGUE TO THE PLAY (spoken by Dario Fo)

The play we are about to perform was first staged in 1974.

At the premiere, the story seemed pretty much impossible, if not downright surreal. In fact we were recounting events which had not yet taken place. We spoke about women in the suburbs of Milan who went out to do their shopping in a supermarket, only to find that all of a sudden the prices had gone through the roof. Enraged, they decided in the first instance to pay only half the listed price for the goods on display, and then not to pay at all. Our tale was pure fantasy.

I recall one detail from those early days when we put the play on at the Palazzina: we called this act of illegal appropriation 'proletarian shopping' or 'civil disobedience'.

There were some critics who accused us of indulging in a form of political theatre which owed more to fantasy, or of dreaming up plots that were ridiculously paradoxical or improbable. Obviously, we are dealing with journalists who were cut off from reality, people that were incapable of listening, or who did not even read the papers they were writing for, and therefore people with no foresight.

A few months later, there exploded in Milan exactly what we had been performing on stage. Exactly the same! The shoppers who went in for 'proletarian shopping' were arrested and put on trial. When the trial opened, one newspaper, *Il Giornale*, then edited by Indro Montanelli, invited the judge to put us in the dock since it was we who, with this comedy, had inspired and instigated the workers to commit the offence of illegal appropriation.

Education and Outreach

Brecht's Alienation Effect versus Fo's anti-catharsis Farce Workshop

Farce seemed to Fo the most effective means of provoking thought. On more than one occasion, he said that his aim was to provoke "laughter with anger". It is a unique combination. There is no shortage of playwrights who have used theatre as a forum for the debate of political subjects. Perhaps the greatest of political playwrights of the twentieth century was the German Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), but while there are comic scenes in Brecht, his plays cannot be described as either comedy or farce. "The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui" (Bruiser's previous production in Spring 2010), is a savage satire on the rise of Hitler, where the Hitler figure is a small-time thug in Chicago who flatters and deceives fellow gangsters until he has attained power, at which point he has them murdered. One of the most comic scenes shows Arturo taking lessons from an actor who has fallen on hard times and who teaches him how to march, parade himself in public, gesticulate and deliver oratory. Brecht preferred drama to comedy, but developed a theory of "alienation effect" which was designed to prevent spectators from becoming so involved in the fiction they were watching that they lost the detachment needed to allow them to judge the politics debated in the play.

Fo too thought deeply about this problem but while he was deeply influenced by Brecht, he was also critical and believed that popular theatre and farce already provided the means to prevent this level of undesirable involvement. He had no intention of producing high-minded, tedious theatre which could not hold people's attention. Entertainment, enjoyment, pleasure were among the goals of theatre. Laughter is, in his view, a mechanism for triggering thought.

Led by Bruiser's Artistic Director, workshops will be offered to schools and colleges on the legacy of Brecht and Political Theatre, with direct reference to "Low Pay? Don't Pay!" and the politics of farce. The workshop will cover:

- Dario Fo - Playwright's life and work
- Introduction giving the background to the play – Italy in 1969.
- Grotesque and Absurd Genres
- Commedia dell'Arte
- Censorship
- Brecht's alienation effect
- Fo's use of farce to alienate
- The importance of political theatre in the 21st century