

The Lesson, by Eugene Ionesco
Touring September 2019- September 2020

Greetings from Icarus Theatre!

We hope you find the following pack helpful, it gives a detailed description of how our proposed show, *The Lesson*, could work in touring venues across the UK and Europe following our 4-6 week London run.

If you require further information, please let me know.

We look forward to discussing *The Lesson* with you.

Yours sincerely,

Hazel Caulfield and Max Lewendel

Creative Producer and Artistic Director

★★★★★ [The Times](#)
★★★★★ [Ham & High](#)
★★★★★ [edfringe.com](#)
★★★★★ [Stiri.Acasa.ro](#)
★★★★★ [Curierul National](#)
★★★★★ [Realitatea.net](#)



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www.icarustheatre.co.uk/past_shows.html



Directed by Max Lewendel. Set Designed by Christopher Hone.
Starring Hazel Caulfield and John Eastman

Ionesco's disturbing, absurdist masterpiece.

"50s absurdism made over as '90s 'in-yer-face' apocalypticism."

-Robert Shore, *Time Out*

The Lesson is both a hysterical farce and riveting tragedy, an absurdist tragicomedy, that explores the depths of totalitarianism and dictatorship.

Tickets: Range between £12-£24, with a considerable concessions discount.

We would take your lead on the guide ticket price for your venue, you know your audience best.

Eugène Ionesco originally intended this tragicomedy as a brutal criticism on Nazi fascism invading the peaceful hearts and minds of the people in his homeland, Romania. The time is perfect to make the comparison to Trump, Brexit, and other contemporary, fascist political figures.

At the play's opening we find a peaceful old professor teaching his bright-eyed, *bonne-élève* student $1+1=2$. When the innocent pupil begins to displease the tutor, the pedagogue gradually turns on her, becoming a ferocious animal bent on her destruction.

This charged political piece is also a very accessible story on power and domination.

The classroom setting becomes a verbal ballet where strength and brutality slowly grind down and crush innocence and enthusiasm.

The metaphor is quite simply a dictator behind the facade of 'working for the many' who becomes drunk with power and hate (i.e., Hitler, Trump). He turns on those to whom he promised a brave new world and becomes ruthless, killing discriminately, imprisoning free thought, and destroying new ideas.

This play can be subtle and powerful, comic and despairing by turns.

Seasoned director **Max Lewendel** tackles *The Lesson* after a long stream of successful large-scale Shakespeare tours. In addition, he has a long record of critically acclaimed work in London; *Albert's Boy* by James Graham ("Theatre at its best", *The Stage*), *Gates of Gold* (Critics' Choice, *Time Out*), including winning the *Time Out Critics' Choice* for his first show at the Finborough.

Running time: Approximately 70 minutes.

For a full tour schedule, please visit the Icarus website at www.icarustheatre.co.uk/shows/lesson3

To book press tickets or for more information, please contact Hazel Caulfield on pr@icarustheatre.co.uk or 0207 998 1562.

Past Production Photos- The Lesson-2007



Pupil: Amy Loughton, Professor: John Eastman



Amy Loughton, John Eastman, Julia Munrow



Amy Loughton, John Eastman

For more information, interviews and images on past productions, please contact
Hazel Caulfield on **020 9981562** or pr@icarus theatre.co.uk.

The Icarus Theatre Collective

Company Limited by Guarantee

Company Reg: 07126012

3-5 Elephant Lane, London, SE16 4JD, pr@icarus theatre.co.uk, www.icarus theatre.co.uk

T 0207 998 1562

Design Outline 2019

The Lesson - A Reimagining

This is not a remounting but a reinvention of the 2007 production where we have compiled the leading aspects including a continued collaboration with the original designers, Matt Downing and Christopher Hone. Icarus is 12 years on and significantly advanced as a company in its visions and execution. We believe that now, more than ever is the time to reimagine this very relevant and timely 1950's absurdist play.

Design Concept

A timely warning of how fascism can seem so warm and comforting, a "return to past values," but in fact seeps into society until its oppressive, destructive force is noticed too late, and overwhelms the innocent who flail ineffectually against its tidal force.

The notable, incessantly subtle fascist themes must be framed and driven forward by the performance of the actors working in concert with the designs: just as the demeanour of the two main characters changes imperceptibly throughout the 70 minutes, so must the designs change through steadily increasing tension. The set begins as a warm, inviting front room in the Professor's home (made all the more welcoming by lighting). As the play goes on, the entire set deconstructs, expanding and collapsing under the weight of the professor's frenetic, chalk scribbles, using the entire playing space as a gigantic blackboard, surrounding, imprisoning, and then torturing the increasingly pitiful and imploding pupil. The lighting follows suit, shifting from warm ambers to harsh blues with sharp gobos, increasingly in focus, increasingly dominating. Costumes deconstruct from the professor's noble robes, to reveal successive layers underneath, each more menacing than the last, but unnoticeable from one step to the next until the final change reveals a symbol of pure fascism, completing his new persona. The pupil's laced-up, obstructive clothing similarly gives way to a vulnerable, innocent victim to the professor's sexual desires.

The sound – based entirely on Bach's fugue series – transforms perhaps most significantly, acting as an additional character in the story: it begins being played off a gramophone as a quaint harpsicord. The harpsicord soon becomes a sharper piano, and then sharp, stabbing notes begin to intrude. The professor interrupts the gramophone... it interrupts him, as if the absurdity of "The Lesson" is intruding into the absurdity of reality. The ballet between the pupil and professor is perfectly complimented by the battle between the gramophone and professor, increasingly sharp, stabbing notes causing the pupil's increasingly plaintive, pianissimo appeal, "Please sir! I've got a toothache," until the pain becomes too much and she is destroyed by the professor's violent sexual urges.

Fascism is a chaotic, destructive, and sexual animal, ravishing all those who once trusted it.

Given the nature of the show, instead of a white-board model, our designer has mocked up a black-board model (See Image overleaf).

Technical Ryder

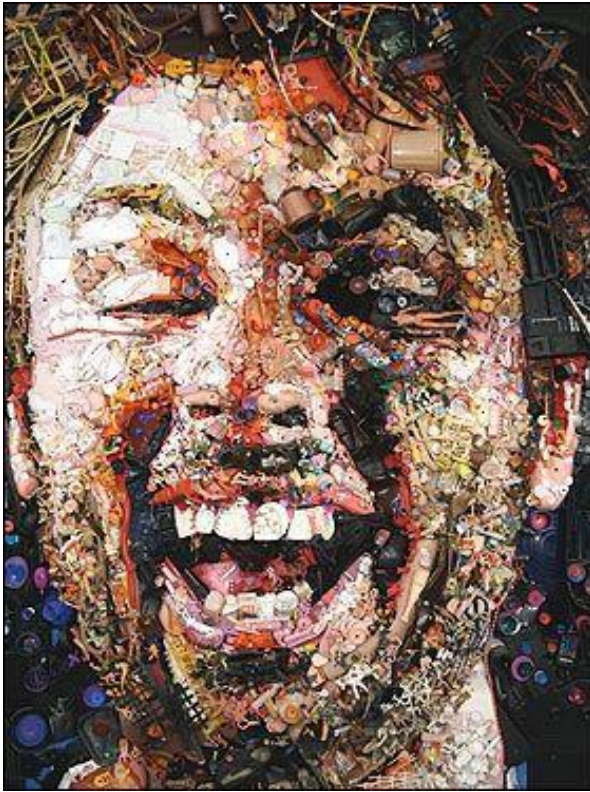
A Technical Ryder will be provided for you venue, closer to the performance dates. Our rig will be adaptable to your space and we will arrive with our own lighting and sound board to be plugged in to any standard in-house system. No part of our set will be needed to be screwed into your floor. We ask for a technician to be provided on the day. We will have our own Stage Manager/ Operator on tour with us.



Black-board model created by Christopher Hone

Marketing

**Current Draft including inspiration pieces; currently being developed by
Graphic Designer Vincent Vyce**



Inspired by the left image, Vincent is currently building an animation of John Eastman, who plays the Professor (right). The animation will appear to be drawn with chalk and the whole image will be made of lots of smaller object (as seen in left image), these objects being classroom books. The below image is our first draft. We will further update you with the finalised Marketing image.



Artistic Policy

The Icarus Theatre Collective explores the harsh, brutal side of contemporary and classical drama. Tales of mutilation, rape, and incest are not anathema to us, rather we choose to relish in what others shy away from, show what others daren't, destroy boundaries when others would create rules.

The Icarus Theatre Collective puts the individual artist at the top of its priorities. Paramount to achieving any goal is respect for artists and their differences, commitment to honesty and integrity, and devotion to the work produced.

Inclusion

We are changing our focus to tackle the increasingly dangerous nativist, misogynist, and racist rhetoric unleashed in the wake of the post-US-election, post-Brexit era.

We will:

- Put female, EU, and BAME artists in staff positions and the central role of new productions
- Ensure disability and demographic are no barrier to making art
- Defy the stigmas surrounding mental health, proving it is a prevalent issue in our society and one that all our central characters live with.

Mission Statement

Icarus aims to team artists from the international community with British artists, experienced artists with promising young professionals, to enable both groups to build rapport and grow as artists. We will not always seek out those who already excel at their chosen craft, but we will look for those who have the potential to become the best under our wing.

Collaboration

Icarus has a collaborative spirit that we will use to engage with venues on all levels. We understand that we would be producing a show in *your* domain and would value your expertise, experience, and enthusiasm. All suggestions herein are open to discussion with yourself and we are happy to follow marketing initiatives advised by you. No one knows your domain and your audiences better than you do.

Building Audiences

The Lesson is ideal for helping venues build audiences. It has a fascinating benefit of drawing not only regular theatre goers, but audiences that don't normally see drama as well. The original production in Paris has been running for 50 years and continues to pack in punters from all walks of life.

Marketing Strategy:

- 1. Post-Show Discussions:** After the show, we usually leave a 10 – 15 minute interval and then the actors return to stage to have a Post-Show discussion with the audience. Most theatres find this very useful to advertise on their websites and in their brochures. This is available to you when of interest to your audience.
- 2. Social Media:** We aim to capture the interest of younger audiences through engagement of Social Media. Today, more and more awareness is raised through Instagram stories, tweets and sponsored links. Part of our budget is dedicated solely to maximizing the impact we have across these platforms.
- 3. Trailer:** We are currently working with a film director to release a trailer, where teasers could be posted on the lead up to the show.
- 4. Free Programme Distribution:** Each audience member will receive a complimentary programme that will include details about the show, information on the team. Furthermore we aim to include discounts inside from our sponsors, providing food and drink offers, plus more. Every audience member will take home our marketing material to share with friends and family.
- 5. Press:** Icarus will be employing a PR Company, such as Chloe Nelkin whom we have used in the past, to gain press on our London run. We will Tweet, FB post and Instagram our reviews, tagging your venue, and provide regular updates that your marketing team can utilise.
- 6. Distribution:** Icarus usually prints a substantial number of leaflets and posters, this has worked well for Icarus' UK tours. We provide bespoke quantities depending on your needs, in A5 (with tour schedule on the back), A3, and B2 sizes.
- 7. Mailing Lists:** Icarus will send newsletters out to our mailing list of over 2,500 contacts and work with your venue to send similar mailings.
- 8. Ticket Prices:** We are very flexible on ticket pricing and are happy to default to your discretion. Normal ticket pricing is between £10 concession and £24 full price. If you want higher or lower, simply let us know in advance.
- 9. Discounted Tickets:** You are welcome to offer a schools and groups discount and create package discount deals at your discretion, up to 50% off. We have a database of 2000 schools and universities across the UK that we will email to offer workshops and ticket deals. We recommend that you approach Schools, Universities, and Colleges in your area directly, as they will be good venues at which to advertise the production.
- 10. Education Programme:** Our show comes with a wide array of workshops and masterclasses that you can sell in conjunction with group ticket offers. Please visit www.icarustheatre.co.uk/workshops.html for more information.

With all these benefits, we hope a short visiting run to your venue will easily sustain and fall in line with your programming strategy.

Company Structure

Artistic Director: Max Lewendel. At Illinois Wesleyan School of Theatre Arts in Bloomington, Illinois, Max completed a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree in Theatre Arts with an emphasis on directing and minors in French Language and Business Administration. After graduation he moved to London and founded The Icarus Theatre Collective (www.icarustheatre.co.uk). After directing a Time Out Critics' Choice show for the Finborough Theatre, they commissioned Max to direct James Graham's *Albert's Boy* (which won the Pearson Playwright Award) starring the late Tony Award winner Victor Spinetti. Max has gone on to co-produce a national tour of *Journeys End* and direct multiple Shakespeare epics across international festivals and large-scale theatres in the UK and Ireland. Currently, Max is producing an international tour of *The Trials of Galileo* and has adapted and directed the first theatrical presentation of HP Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness*, both starring his former professor, RSC veteran and RADA faculty, Tim Hardy.

Creative Producer: Hazel Caulfield. In addition to producing, Hazel is an actress and GSA graduate. Since graduating, she has played Jess (Lead), in BBC's *The Lives I Lead* - a Docu-Drama telling the story of Jess, and her 6 alternate identities. She physicalized Juliet in a Bulgarian Bilingual production of *Romeo & Juliet*, performed in the mountains of Patalenitsa, and extensively toured the UK with a three-handed production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* - plenty of hat juggling! Hazel and Artistic Director Max Lewendel met when she auditioned for Icarus' 2017 UK tour of *Hamlet*, and we began discussing producing when I offered her the role of the Pupil on this proposed production.

Set Designer: Christopher Hone. Design veteran Christopher Hone returns to Icarus' accomplished team for the 13th time. His designs can currently be seen on the BAFTA Award winning ITV show, *This Morning* where he is staff Art Director. Having worked closely with Icarus on many past productions from London Fringe venues to 2000 seaters in Ireland, his work has consistently proved adaptable, intelligent, and innovative.

Costume Design: Issy Van Braeckel. Issy spent her early childhood in Munich and Prague and is greatly inspired by European art forms including Theatre; she creatively applies her passion, research and knowledge of other cultures into her work. Issy has worked as a designer and assistant with Punchdrunk, Sell A Door, Les Enfants Terribles, Louis Vuitton, Tete- A -Tete Opera, English Pocket Opera Company, Rambert School of Dance among others. Furthermore, she is the Director of 'The Deckchair Collective' a collective set up in early 2012 to create 24 hour plays with young creatives, build up experience on minimal budget, an unusual theme and using whatever location they can get hold of.

Lighting Design: Stevie Carty. Stevie joined Icarus' creative team on *Hamlet* as the assistant lighting designer, after having been stage manager and re-lighter on *The Trials of Galileo*. She is a lighting savant and quickly progressed to be the Lighting Designer for Icarus' next tour, *Macbeth*. Alongside her work with Icarus, Stevie has designed and programmed lights for *The Humans* at the Hampstead theatre, *Mayfly* at the Orange Tree and *Here* at Greenwich Theatre.

Sound Design: Matt Downing. Matt's sound design has earned him great acclaim, and Icarus are very excited to welcome him back on this production. He has an ear for subtlety and detail, Matt's understanding of the audience senses allow his sound design to blend deeply into a production, it becomes an omnipotent character woven into the narrative. Theatrical credits include *Mud* at the Gate, London; *Gates of Gold* at Trafalgar Studios; *Year 10* at the Théâtre National Bretagne, the Théâtre National de Strasbourg and the Battersea Arts Centre; *Food* at the Traverse, Edinburgh; *Mariana Pineda* and *Gaudeamus* at the Arcola; *The Gigli Concert* at the Assembly Rooms; *The Rat Trap*, *The Gabriels*, *Year 10*, and *Etta Jenks* all at the Finborough; *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Canterville Ghost* at the Southwark Playhouse; a tour of *Twelfth Night*; & *Hamlet* at the Tivoli, Dublin. He writes music for television and very occasionally for fun.

Further Documentation

Past Awards:

Best Actress in a leading role- Amy Loughton in Romania

Special Jury Prize in Romania

Soundbites:

"It is impossible not to enjoy Icarus Theatre Collective's production of Ionesco's one-act play".

"John Eastman plays the professor with the right balance of menace and hilarity".

"Julia Munrow makes a **strikingly** austere figure".

"An inventive use of the stage".

"The classical music adds to the sense of urgency and madness".

"Perfectly cast".

"Amy Loughton plays the wide-eyed pupil with such huge enthusiasm".

"Absurd theatre that will leave you scratching your head in wonder".

"Disturbing".

-Francesca Whiting, *The Stage*

"Ionesco's strange parable of sex'n'violence".

"Max Lewendel's touring production succeeds by the strength of its acting and the steadily increasing tension".

"His direction introduces a more vivid sexuality than Peter Hall would have been permitted in 1955".

"Something more alarming than education is going on here".

"This remains a timely and fascinating play".

Jeremy Kingston, *The Times*

"Comedy, tragedy, fear, mystery, sex, violence, disturbance: The Lesson has them all".

"The reality/fantasy barrier is very narrow".

"Powerful".

"Genius".

"Brilliant".

"These larger-than-life characters, in this illogical scenario, are living and breathing right at your feet".

"The concise set (designed by Christopher Hone) fits perfectly with the action and almost becomes a character in itself".

"An extremely effective metaphor for the deterioration of the lesson and the loss of control".

"The characters are the focal point of The Lesson".

"Loughton masterfully portrayed the deterioration of The Pupil".

"Intense, hyperbolic characters".

"The very particular way [the music] is introduced establishes music as an innate aspect of the play... to strengthen and give further meaning to times of high tension or importance".

"The general intensity of this play is its strongest point, however it is by no means all there is to it".

"The play ends, a neat circle, which Ionesco has linked up so perfectly".

"We clearly see the genius of The Lesson and, hence, Icarus Theatre's interpretation".

-Eleanor Weber, *Raddest Right Now*

"The Icarus Theatre collective's production of Eugene Ionesco's absurdist masterpiece is brilliant. A fast-paced, sixty-five minute screaming journey from a bare classroom into utter chaos".

"The staging perfectly compliments the solid performances"

"It is not the characters that have learnt from this lesson, but the audience themselves".

-Kevin Hurst, *Extra! Extra!*

"Directed so specifically that the beast of chaos that charges through Ionesco's work like his own rhinoceros is safely routed through the play".

"Lewendel's Icarus Theatre Collective is a strong team".

"A subtle choice of music underscores the text".

"The design, brilliantly conceived to reflect the galloping chaos".

-Rebecca Banks, *Ham & High*

Reviews



Jeremy Kingston, *The Times*

Here is a bracing account of a play that helped to thrust its author to the forefront of the so-called Theatre of the Absurd some 50 years ago. I had not expected Ionesco's strange parable of sex'n'violence to hold the stage so well, after many of the ideas he initiated have spread into the mainstream. But Max Lewendel's touring production for Icarus Theatre succeeds by the strength of its acting and the steadily increasing tension. His direction introduces a more vivid sexuality than Peter Hall would have been permitted in 1955, directing the first English production at a time when theatre censorship preferred French windows to French drama.

A pupil arrives at a professor's apartment. She is eager, impulsive and, as Amy Loughton plays her, unaware that she radiates sexuality. She twirls her fingers, she bounces, she grins and disconcerts the stammering young-old professor. John Eastman smiles awkwardly, fiddles with his academic gown, praises her slightest achievement. That she knows that one and one make two sends him into ecstasy.

But problems appear. Subtraction baffles her, though she can multiply billions. No longer is she the model pupil. Eastman's voice hardens. He throws chalk. When he switches to philology she is slow to grasp the distinctions of pronunciation that the audience realises do not exist.

Something more alarming than education is going on here, and when eventually, as bookshelves collapse, he symbolically rapes and stabs her to death (the 40th pupil he has thus dispatched that day) we are watching the workings of unchecked power. In the closing scene the professor's culpably forgiving maid (Julia Munrow) pins a US armband on him (in Ionesco's text he suggests a swastika), and the author shows himself as political – and contemporary – as any writer setting his play in a modern war zone. This remains a timely and fascinating play.

Francesca Whiting, *The Stage*

It is impossible not to enjoy Icarus Theatre Collective's production of Ionesco's one-act play. It is a perfectly cast piece of absurd theatre that will leave you scratching your head in wonder.

John Eastman plays the professor with the right balance of menace and hilarity, initially mild-mannered, but as his pupil's limitations become more evident, his frustrations grow until he becomes a dangerous, bullying tyrant.

Increasingly sinister looks are thrown at his innocent pupil, while Julia Munrow makes a strikingly austere figure as the maid, who warns the professor not to teach mathematics or philology. But her warnings fall on deaf ears as he becomes more frantic - not unlike the sketch from TV's *The Fast Show*, where Johnny Nice Painter transforms into a madman at the mention of the word 'black' - "Black, black - you lock me in the cellar and feed me pins!"

There's an inventive use of the stage as blackboards double up to become doors, and the floor becomes a blackboard, as the play gains pace and the professor frantically scribbles in chalk everywhere, while the classical music adds to the sense of urgency and madness. One

particularly effective exchange is when the professor is teaching his pupil how to subtract. She cannot understand the concept of subtraction, although she turns out to be a genius at addition, and so ensues a fast-paced exchange of numbers between them.

Amy Loughton plays the wide-eyed pupil with such huge enthusiasm that she is constantly jiggling about, and any irritation at her over-acting is short lived as the play becomes increasingly nonsensical and disturbing.

Rebecca Banks, *Ham & High*

Almost full marks school of Absurd

They start mad and they get madder. Yet such is the energy compelling the characters in this production that the audience are aghast as they observe 50 different ways to teach $4 - 3 = 1$ for one and a half hours.

Written by Eugene Ionesco as a political analogy in 1951, *The Lesson* becomes a nightmare as the teacher turns into a violent dictator.

Ionesco is a brave or foolish choice for a newcomer. This is Theatre of The Absurd and it can fall flat on its face at the drop of a hat.

But director Max Lewendel has his own vision for the piece.

The actors start larger than life. Amy Loughton's impossibly keen, impossibly innocent pupil twists her fingers in a study of manic gaucheness. And when she sits, anticipation lifts her legs and excitement crosses and uncrosses her feet with intriguing speed.

John Eastman is intensely focused as the professor. His impeccably formal congratulations on the correct answer to $1 + 1$ burst forth with well-meaning fervour and delight - only to switch to the utmost gravity as he asks for her views on 'plurality' with such deliberation that the question quivers with significance.

This is how the mania and the high style succeed. The actor's energy is directed so specifically that the beast of chaos that charges through Ionesco's work like his own rhinoceros is safely routed through the play.

Lewendel's Icarus Theatre Collective is a strong team.

A subtle choice of music underscores the text.

The design, brilliantly conceived to reflect the galloping chaos, consists of the whole set and everything in it being painted mat black - so the chalked messages that begin on the blackboard spill out onto cupboards, walls, tables, floor, like graffiti escaped.

★★★★★ ***Vince, edfringe.com***

Excellent 18 Aug 2007

Ionesco's madness, surreal style and humour can be difficult to understand if you have never heard of him. Some of his French play may even be impossible to translate, but This play is fantastically translated and played by professional actors. A real pleasure.

★★★★★ ***[Curierul National](http://CurierulNational.ro)***

★★★★★ ***[Metropotam](http://Metropotam.ro)***

★★★★★ ***Realitatea.net***

★★★★★ ***Stiri.Acasa.ro***

★★★★★ ***[Diseara](http://Diseara.ro)***

★★★★★ ***9pm.ro***

Marketing Images for Past Icarus Productions







