Rhinoceros Audition pack



Rhinoceros by Eugène Ionesco

Translated by Derek Prouse

Audition Sunday 13th December 5-8pm in the Function room

Director: Felicity Westmacott

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Stage manager: Jacquie Redfern

Production co-ordinator: Tulin Udul

Playing dates
Monday 1st March until Saturday 10th April 2027
Performing in the main house

Rehearsals from mid January
Mostly Tuesday and Thursday evenings and Sunday afternoons
Schedule to be confirmed after casting

Membership
If you are not yet a member of the Archway theatre you will be asked to join if you are cast. Membership for performers costs £35 for a year and is obligatory for anyone involved in a production backstage or on stage. You do not need to be a member to audition.
https://archwaytheatre.co.uk/join.html

Audition plan
5pm Introduction
5.15pm Physical warm up and optional movement/simple dance demo
5.45pm Smaller roles seen as part of group scenes
6.30pm Medium and larger roles

I have no plan for call-backs, however if interest is either very high or limited, further audition dates may be created as required.

Intimacy:

There are optional minor moments of intimacy written into the play for **Daisy and Berenger.** These are non-obligatory and will be directed to suit the comfort of the cast members involved. Elodie Bass our resident intimacy co-ordinator will guide us through these moments where appropriate.

Physical theatre:

Parts of our set will be mimed or created by the cast using our bodies. Relative comfort with movement direction, physical contact with others and some stamina is ideal, however we will adapt and direct the action around cast member's abilities.



All members of the cast will be asked to become part of the Rhinoceros chorus in the second Act, wearing masks. Being a rhinoceros will involve some simple, accessible dancing (repetitive, noisy, loose limbed). Depending on who auditions and is cast there are opportunities for live singing or guitar (or pre-recorded by a cast member).

Plot Summary

"Who knows what is good and what is evil? You're only concerned with yourself. That's the truth. But you'll never really become a rhinoceros… you haven't got the chops!"

Normal everyday life in a small town on the edge of the country. A greengrocer, a cafe, a lost cat. And flags gently waving on lamposts, it all seems very familiar… Jean and Berenger meet for a drink, but what is lurking on the edges of the town?

When the impossible materialises in the form of an unexpected, and much debated rhinoceros the townsfolk begin to question what is real. And furthermore what is normal?

As people attempt to continue everyday life amid the crisis of rising levels of Rhinonceritis, is holding onto their humanity more trouble than it's worth? As Jean begs his friends and colleagues not to succumb, he is invited to consider his own sanity in the face of the pressure to conform. Which is more absurd: becoming a Rhinoceros or questioning the herd mentality?





This production:
Originally written in French with a strong anti-facist message, we will be updating some of the language and references to make sure the audience understands how relevant this story is to our own time, as much as in 1937.

Our version of the play will be set in millennial times (might be anything 1990-2015) in a small town quite near Gatwick airport. The acting and design in this production will at times be exaggerated and larger than life. Directing will be collaborative. We will be encouraging the audience to participate in the action and feel part of the story. Smaller roles will very much be part of the action and scene setting, creating the atmosphere, and sometimes the set. Actors will be using their bodies as objects, for sound effects and for comical effect.

A little flavour of the rhinos coming through the walls and windows
https://www.instagram.com/reels/DUKKAx9Dfkr/



Rhinoceros Playlist (work in progress)
https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6zFVPGq8tF1JEBG692Ukpq?si=mneE1EJsRei_-wtGoJOhJQ&utm_source=copy-link&pi=5wkk1KEqTPWld

Cast

The following characters may all be any gender and age as long as the overall story will still make sense. The smaller roles that appear in only one scene could be doubled.

Larger roles

Berenger: The lazy, alienated, and heavy-drinking protagonist who resists conforming. But he is also strong willed and kind, the only character left human at the end of the play. Appears throughout the whole play. Playing age 25-40

Jean: Berenger's arrogant, rational, and well-dressed friend who eventually transforms into a rhinoceros. Appears in 3 out of 4 scenes. Playing age, older than Berenger.

Medium size roles

Daisy: Berenger's love interest and an office coworker. Appears in 3 out of 4 scenes. Playing age 18+

Dudard: An intellectual office coworker and rival for Daisy's affection. Appears in 2 scenes. Playing age 25+

The office workers, Small/Medium Roles (could be doubled with a townsperson role)

Botard: A cynical, skeptical senior office worker. Age 50+

Mr. Papillon: The office head/boss. Age 40+

Mrs. Bœuf: A devoted wife who jumps after her transformed husband.



Townspeople, small roles

The Logician: A pedantic character who strictly trusts abstract logic.

The old(er) gentleman (or Lady:) polite and old fashioned

Grocer: Keen to do business

Grocer's wife: A busybody and gossip

Housewife (and her beloved cat): distraught when her cat is hurt

Cafe owner: a tough boss

Waiter/ress: a sensible, efficient worker even when all around is madness

The firefighter: 5 lines only

Rhinoceros Chorus: be a Rhinoceros only. No lines, second half of the play only. Some simple accessible dance (rhythmic movement), stamping and kazoos.

Audition pieces:

Page numbers refer to the script we are using for the production, a copy of which may be borrowed on request using the contact details at the top of this document.

An online version of the script can be found here, but the page numbers do not match.

https://www.scribd.com/document/730619275/Rhinoceros-Eugene-Ionesco

Bereneger:

Act 3 final monologue, “Men aren’t so bad looking… to the end of the play. With last line changed to ‘I will not surrender’. P143-147

Other sections as and when Berenger appears in other people’s scenes.

Jean:

Act 1 Berating Berenger, “Oh, so you managed to get here at last… to “keep the tie, I’ve got plenty more” P8-10

Act 2 Beginning to transform “I don’t feel well… to “It’s a sign of virility”. P84-88

Also needed, Jean

Daisy:

Act 3, bringing news of more transformations “Morning Mr Dudard… to, ‘and some of the aristocracy, the Duke of St Simon - replacing the cardinal and the Duke with any more current celebrity or politician or your choice. P119-123

Also needed, Berenger and Dudard.

Dudard:

Act 3 Calming Berenger down: “Calm yourself now, and sit down… to, “no trouble at all” P103-108

Also needed, Berenger

Botard:

Act 1 scene 2 The office skeptic: “I never believe journalists… to, “Everybody is chivalrous to Miss Daisy, it’s quite understandable” P56-61

Also needed Papillion, Daisy, Berenger

Mr. Papillon:

Act 1 scene 2 Encouraging his staff not to be distracted: from Botard “Your Rhinoceros is a myth”... to “I shall see you shortly gentlemen” P63-64

Also needed

Botard, Dudard, Berenger, Daisy

Mrs. Bœuf:

Act 1 Scene 2 Witnessing the transformation of her husband Berenger “Oh here’s Mrs Beouf, Daisy”... to “Oh! Ah!” P66-67 and “My poor darling, I can’t leave him like that” to “Here I am my sweet, I am here now” P72-73

Also needed

Botard, Dudard, Berenger, Daisy, Papillon

The Logician and the old gentleman(or lady):

Logic theories “Here is an example of a syllogism”... to “you’re already making progress in logic” P28-35, omitting other characters' lines for speed.

Grocer, Grocer’s wife, Housewife (and her beloved cat, proprietor(cafe owner) Waiter/ress:

Act 1 Scene 1 Street life from Proprietor “what’s going on?”... to old Gentleman “Charming, isn’t she?” P15-20

And from Logician “A Rhinoceros, going full tilt…” to Jean “No, it was not the same rhinoceros”

Also needed, Logician, old gentleman, Jean, Berenger, Daisy P37-41

Grocer: “well, it may be logical”... to “no we’re standing for it” P52

Also needed, proprietor grocer’s wife

The firefighter. Five lines only. “Are you happy” to ‘fire-mans lift’ one or more other actors? “Who’s next”… to end of scene. P78-80

About the Author

Eugene Ioneso was born in 1909 and brought up moving between France and Romania. His connections to both countries were formative but he eventually settled in France. After a childhood existential experience of luminosity followed by disappointment in the real world his work often reflects a sense of harsh reality counterposed against an emotional ideal. He began writing plays later in life with his initial offering first performed in 1950. Prior to that he wrote poetry and criticism and towards the end of his career he returned to theoretical writing on performance and philosophy. He has been grouped alongside such playwrights as Sartre, Beckett and Camus as a member of the loosely associated Absurdist theatre movement. Ionesco was derisive of the Brechtian style but a great admirer of other contemporary art styles including Surrealism and Dadaism.

In a section of his writing entitled “Experience of Theatre’ Ioneso describes how much he disliked attending the theatre as a child. He felt it provided “no pleasure or feeling of participation’. He felt that realistic theatre was less interesting than performances that explore “imaginative truth”.

As such our performance of Rhinoceros will walk wide of reality. The fourth wall will not just be broken down but thoroughly demolished. Comedy, surrealism and audience participation will be core to the direction. I hope to have a set made of paper that can be torn to pieces, a foley table for live sound effects and kazoos enabling our audience to ‘comment’ on the action will mean this play brings its hard-headed message without ever being dry. Reminding us that something that is fun might none the less still be either useful or indeed inherently immoral.

As Rhinoceroses rip through the paper walls of our set so will some home-truths about the current world political events and how these affect our everyday lives. It is essential we step up and participate in the political and cultural world, woken from our soma-pleasure and not just watching the world turn as if it were a play.

Why he wrote the play

Critics believe Eugene Ionesco wrote the play as a critique of not just fascism, a theme which is overt in the play but also of Communism and indeed any ‘ism’ towards which people wander blindly forward. There are many references and language choices that point towards the specific experiences of living through Nazi occupied France and the anti-semitism of daily life under that regime.

References such as the argument in act one of whether the Rhinoceros are Asiatic or African were once widely recognisable political references (the Jews were believed to be an ‘Asiatic Race; by Nazi race theory) but with the passage of time these, once unsubtle, clues seem largely mundane by repetition to a modern, less historically educated audience.

The Archway production

I hope to work through the script, both before rehearsals and with the cast to identify and, where useful, update such outdated cultural and political references to terms more recognisable and relevant, along the same themes. Perhaps phrases such as the ‘orange menace’ ‘people in small boats’ or ‘the 52%’ will better draw parallels for our audience about how relevant Ionesco’s ideas still are today.

Early productions
Despite the hilarity of the absurdist style Rhinoceros has never been part of the core repertoire of amateur or small theatre, due to its rather hardcore themes. It has nonetheless enjoyed many, if sporadic productions in the 65 years since its first performance in 1960, both professional and amateur. Many great actors and directors have taken on the task of interpreting its message to their modern audience. Notable names include Laurence Olivier, Annette Crosbie, Peter Sallis, Maggie Smith and Paul Hunter among others.

It is with sadness as well as excitement that I now approach this task myself, if only such themes could become historical artefacts only.

Absurdist Theatre

Absurdist theatre is marked by its tendency to portray action without apparent purpose or direction, characters that move through circular plotlines where ‘nothing happens’ or who are propelled through events without any agency. It often mixes vaudeville style comedy with extreme tragedy. The writing may make liberal use of cliche and nonsense discarding many or all of the literary elements of the ‘well made play. The playwrights who wrote in this style (a term applied to them by the critic Martin Esslin in 1960) often sought to dismiss or parody reality rather than depict it faithfully but with the hope of creating deeper knowledge of the world outside the theatre.

Martin Esslin said that the experience of watching Absurdist theatre “may be painful, but it leaves behind it a sense of freedom and relief. And that is why, in the last resort, the Theatre of the Absurd does not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of liberation”
Absurd Drama (1965)

My relationship to the play

I was introduced to Rhinoceros in 2004 as a costume design project during my degree in that subject. Designing a play as an intellectual exercise with an imaginary, unlimited budget is a very different project that the real world of amateur theatre. But often the decisions forced upon us by financial restrictions or the reality of rehearsing around work and family life lead to choices that are far more interesting, and connected to the real world, than when anything is possible.

Having held my first design ideas in my mind for 20 years and occasionally waxed lyrical about the play to my wife Rachel, I was delighted when she brought me news of a professional London production. I was fortunate enough to obtain a ticket to one of the three remaining performances in the run at the Almeida Theatre and was blown away. The play had been lifted off the page in ways far beyond my more literal interpretation at university. I have tried to obtain the most recent translation, by the Almeida’s director, Omar Elerian, but in the absence of that being available Derek Prouse’s translation will be our starting point. I

will be encouraging my cast to bring their own ideas about updating their characters and the language in the play.