

Upcoming Productions

Fall 2023

Marilyn Swartz Seven '69

reading / reception

THE GAME by Solomon Hess '24

Steerman New Play Festival

featuring works by:

Joe Baldwin, Sydney Duncan, Stefen Dodson,

Jean Fassler, and Solomon Hess

Spring 2024

SKIN by Naomi Iizuka

HURRICANE DIANE by Madeleine George

OR by Liz Duffy Adams

Reservations

boxoffice@vassar.edu

(845) 437-5599

website: <http://drama.vassar.edu>

M-F 10:00 am-4:00 pm

Individuals with disabilities requiring accommodations or information on accessibility should contact the box office in advance.

The Experimental Theater of Vassar College

Mad Forest

A Play from Romania

By Caryl Churchill

Directed by Christopher Grabowski

Ben Turner '23 senior project in Drama

April 26, 27, 28 2023

8:00 p.m.

Martel Theater

Presented through special arrangements with Concord Theatricals

On the plain where Buchaarest now stands there used to be a “large forest crossed by small muddy streams....It could only be crossed on foot and was impenetrable for the foreigner who did not know the paths... The horsemen of the steppe were compelled to go round it, and this difficulty, which irked them so, is shown by the name...Teleorman

- Mad Forest.”

A concise History of Romania,

Otetea and MacKenzie

Faculty Advisor

Kenisha Kelly

Cast

Bogdan

Conrad Schott

Grandmother/Vampire/ Securitate/
Wayne/Soldier/Waiter

Joe Baldwin '24

Irina/Grandfather

Shona Tucker

Lucia

Vi To '24

Florina

Georgia Macy '24

Gabriel

Ben Turner*

Rodica/Doctor/Waiter

Charlotte Harter '23

Mihai

Yuchen Zhou '24

Flavia/Toma

Sydney Duncan '24

Radu/Soldier #1

Aiden Skelly '26

Ianos/Patient

Sam Andrews '25

Angel/Dog/Man with a Sore Throat/Ghost

Matthew Fisher '24

Priest/Old Aunt/Flavia's Grandmother/Soldier #2

Simeon Bremer '23

*Additional roles played by the ensemble***ACT I: Lucia's Wedding
Intermission****ACT II: December****ACT III: Florina's Wedding****Drama Department Workstudy Students****Costume Shop**

Interns: Matt Andres '23, Hanh Rioux '23

Costume History & Design Research Assistant: Presley Wheeler '23

Costume Collection Research Assistant: Hannah Weintraub '25

Costume Shop Tech:

Evelyn Boyle '23, Simeon Bremer '23, Celeste Brinkhuis '24,
Mahalia Hunter '23, Georgia Macy '24, Yasmin Mohammed
'23, Gus Pointer Mace '25, Madison Powell '23, Eden
Radifera '26, Athena Randall '25, Foster Schrader '25, Taylor
Talcott '23, Jazmine Williams '26**Electrics Shop**

Lighting Interns: Laurel Hanson '23, Xander Setchko '24

Electrics Crew:

Jackson Bernreuter '24, Grayson Bullard '26, Harry Malins
'26, Erin Mee '24, Avery Nahf '26, Eden O'Connell '23,
Vi To '24 Ki'tsai Zangpo '25,**Scenic Shop**

Scenic Intern: Riley Bates '24

Shop Intern: Jack Francis '23

Assistants:

Becca Bogstad '26, Lucinda Carroll '24, Zach Cohen '24, Eli
Levitt '24, Alex Roth '24, Aiden Skelly '26, Jasper Smith '25,
Avery Turnbull '26, Jamie Walsh '25, Kendall Wienecke '24

Drama Department Faculty and Staff

Director of Theater	Christopher Grabowski
Costume Design	Kenisha Kelly
Production Manager	Patience Haskell
Technical Director	James Hunting
Costume Shop Manager	Leigh Davis
Publicity/Box Office/Front of House	Joan Gerardi

Drama Department Interns

Production Management	Maggie Young '25
Stage Management	Kelly Hatfield '23

Drama Box Office Staff

Assistants:	Sophia Fredericks '26 Tim Nguyen '23 Alejandra Robins '24
Drama Department Photographer:	Ana Leon Urrutia '26

Ushers

Jackson Bernreuter '24, Rose Golick '26,
Joseph Goldin '26, Kelly Hatfield '23, Awien Jel '26,
Elainna Kunkler-Peck '25, Lanie Mussina '26, Jagger Risk '26,
Chloe Vaiman '26, Yuhui Wang '25, Kit'sai Zangpo '25

Special Thanks

Adam's Fairacre Farm, Anne Burda, Radu-Mihai Florea, Denise Iris,
Aaron Mankin, Thomas Wesson, Steven Wooley '14

Production

Director	Christopher Grabowski
Assistant Director	Ella Talerico '25 Abby Bettencourt '25
Dramaturg	Amanda Culp
Assistant Dramaturg	Simeon Bremer '23
Scenic Co-Designers	Christopher Grabowski and James Hunting
Costume Designer	Kenisha Kelly
Lighting Designer	Brandon Stirling Baker
Sound Designer	Ben Turner '23
Stage Manager	Carina Jiang '24
Fight Captain	Conrad Schott
Assistant Stage Manager	Isaac Steinberg '26 Levi Srebalus '26
Assistant Scenic Designer	Aiden Skelly '26
Assistant Costume Designers	Maggie Young '25 Olivia Salva '25
Assistant Lighting Designer	Nyoman Fowler-Puja '23 Ananya Agrawal '26
Actor Representative	Aiden Skelly '26
Light Board Operator	Ananya Agrawal '26
Sound Board Operator	Katie Brady Gold '26
Costume Run Crew	Faith Hernandez '24 Alexandra Polur-Gold '25 Evelyn Boyle '23 Taylor Talcott '23
Run Crew	Joe Lippman '26
Prop Run Crew	Solstice '26
Set Build Crew	Ivy Schenk '25 Cody Siegel '26
Light Installation	Sam Geesing '24

Dramaturgy Note by Amanda Culp & Simeon Bremer '23

A favorite anecdote that we have come across in our research for this production is one that, perhaps unsurprisingly, involves theater students. The events of the Romanian Revolution of 1989—the “it” that many characters in the play hope will start without speaking its name—were put into motion after an uprising in the city of Timisoara was violently put down by the army. The uprising, and its suppression, fomented unrest across the country, which dictator Nicolae Ceausescu attempted to address, and quell, his penultimate address to the nation. Attributing the unrest to gangs of “bandits, Hungarian spies, and traitors [...] creating civil disturbances in Timisoara,” Ceausescu assured his listeners, and his detractors, that the demands for reform would be met “when the poplar trees have pears.”¹ Which is to say, never. And yet the next morning, paper pears could be found dangling from all the poplar trees in the capital city of Bucharest, hung there, as the rumor goes, by the theater and cinema students from the university. “It” had officially begun.

It is fitting, then, that Caryl Churchill’s dramatic treatment of this tumultuous moment was also written for a group of young actors: students from the Central School of Speech and Drama in London. In her trademark style, Churchill’s lens on this story is both human and supernatural, both personal and political, both historically grounded and theatrically imaginative. Written contemporaneously with the events it depicts, *Mad Forest* captures the confusion, elation, fear, and liberation that were felt in real time across Romania, as citizens sought to make sense of the end of a regime that had dominated and terrified them for nearly a quarter of a century. The three acts of this play span three distinct dramatic styles, emulating the evolution of a revolution from surveillance and anticipation, to the gritty hyper-realism of live-on-the-ground reportage, to the uncertainty and chaos that emerge in voids of power. What her dramaturgy offers us, then, is not just a play about the Romanian Revolution, but a document of a society in revolutionary flux. *Mad Forest* also brilliantly anticipates our current political climate of perpetual “in-the-thick-of-it-ness.” The play had its world premiere on June 13th 1990, less than a month after Ion Iliescu was elected president in Romania’s first free elections. Coincidentally, June 13th also marked the most violent day in Romania since the Revolution in December, as demonstrators protesting the victory of Iliescu’s party were brutally put down by a pre-dawn police raids.

The play does not, in other words, have critical distance from the events that it depicts, and as such captures the vertiginous effect of seeking truth in a sea of constantly changing (mis)information. As twenty-first century Americans, we are no strangers to this phenomenon. The twenty-four hour news cycle in which we live, amplified from every platform on social media and every television in a public venue, situates us continually within an unfolding historical moment. The play’s title is a translation of the Romanian word *Teleorman*, used to describe the dense and unnavigable woods that once stood on the land that is now Bucharest. But it is also an apt metaphor for what it feels like to live in the thick of history. How do you make sense of where you are when you can’t see the forest for the trees?

¹ Andrei Codrescu, *The Hole in the Flag: A Romanian Exiles Story of Return and Revolution*. New York: Avon Books, 1991: 33.

About the Playwright

Caryl Churchill (b.1938) is one of the most influential living English-language playwrights. Her dramatic career – which dates back to the middle of the twentieth century – is groundbreaking in its character and scope. She has earned four Obie Awards for her work in playwriting, including a lifetime achievement in 2001. Churchill’s plays approach difficult subjects like misogyny, colonialism, and abuse of power through innovative and postmodern techniques. Her most celebrated work, the 1982 play *Top Girls*, examines capitalism and feminism in Thatcherite Britain. Through surreal dream sequences, rapid character changes, and unconventional storytelling techniques, Churchill invites the audience to ask what it means for a woman to succeed in a world built by men. Churchill is a mainstay of the Vassar College Drama Department. First-year students study her 1979 anti-colonialist play, *Cloud Nine*, in *Introduction to Theater-Making*. Some of her other works such as *Love and Information*, *A Mouthful of Birds*, *Cloud Nine*, and *Top Girls* have even featured on Vassar’s mainstage in the past two decades. *Mad Forest* is one of Churchill’s later works, published after the successes of *Top Girls* and *Cloud Nine*. In March 1990 – only months after the Revolution – Churchill and a cadre of ten students from London’s Central School of Speech and Drama arrived in Romania and started devising this work based on interviews and artistic collaborations with people in the country. The final work, which premiered in London in the summer of 1990, is a shining example of Churchill’s distinctive *modus operandi* – postmodern, surreal techniques that stage a complex dissertation on the abuse of power.