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 Bucharest 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
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

*denotes a senior project in Drama

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

Faculty Advisor
Kenisha Kelly

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


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.