

CATSPLAY

COMPANY THEATRE
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
ROBIN PHILLIPS
ASSOCIATE DIRECTORS
JEREMY BRETT
JOE MANDEL
JOAN PLOWRIGHT

by **ISTVAN ORKENY**
translated by **MARI KUTTNA**

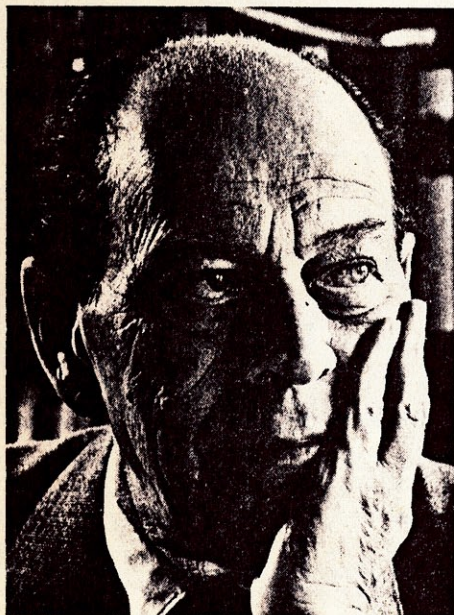
Director **ROBIN PHILLIPS**
Designer **DAPHNE DARE**
Lighting **NICK CHELTON**

ISTVAN ORKENY

Mari Kuttna

The author of *Catsplay* is one of the very few contemporary Hungarian writers whose name, or even fame, has reached beyond Hungary and beyond the Eastern bloc. This is all the more remarkable as until now his output has been limited to a handful of short stories and three plays. But even his first two plays have achieved resounding stage successes, and by now, both have been filmed by leading directors.

In one interview, Orkeny was asked why isn't he more prolific? Why, seeing the success of his works, does he not write more? He replied with disconcerting candour that he writes whenever he gets an idea. It is true that his ideas are always original and always expressed with meticulous precision.



And then, the first forty years of his life passed through a period of Hungarian history when his urbane, intelligent talent for gentle mockery was unlikely to be appreciated. During World War Two, he fought on the Eastern front, and a long detention in a prison camp served as

material for his first collection of stories. During the grim 1950's he attempted an uneasy compromise between insight and the proper, official line expected of serious writers. One story, called *Purple Ink*, became a *cause celebre*, drawing violent attacks from the establishment, as the element of love-interest was deemed a threat to the nation's moral fibre. Not until the better-balanced intellectual climate of the sixties did Orkeny come into his own as the exponent of a rare and precious literary quality, wit.

Among the three-hundred odd authors and playwrights who constitute Hungary's literary elite, there is a surprising number offering genuine talent, but only a few who could match Orkeny's deep, pervasive sense of humour; and even these few would be unlikely to see just why brevity should be the soul of wit. But Orkeny would side with Polonius in this; he first displayed his true gifts in an art form he has practically made his own, his *One-Minute Tales* (Egyperces novellák). He defined these *Tales* as mathematical equations: a minimal communication by the author, balanced against the maximum of imaginative effort by the reader.

The novel on which his internationally successful first play, *The Toth Family* was based, is likewise brief. It made for a terse, dense play with a great deal of movement and action. The same applies to *Catsplay*, which originated as a film-script, was at first rejected by the studios, succeeded as a novel and was eventually dramatized. Early in the rehearsals for the present production, the cast became aware that the plot was a jigsaw-construction of short scenes, not unlike a film-script, though a great deal more polished.

Through his wife who is its literary adviser, Orkeny has been associated with a theatre in Budapest, called the Vigszinhaz, for some years. Though *The Toth Family* had been produced elsewhere, with *Catsplay* he returned to the chamber-theatre of the Vigszinhaz, and to its all-star troupe of actors. It is worth noting

Preview Wednesday 24 October at 8 pm
Opening Thursday 25 October at 8 pm
Press Night Monday 29 October at 7 pm
Closes Saturday 17 November

The Cast

Mrs Orban **ELIZABETH BERGNER**
Giza **MARGARET RAWLINGS**
Paula **MAGGIE FITZGIBBON**
Waiter **JOHN ROGAN**
Mousey **CHERRY MORRIS**
Ilona **PENELOPE KEITH**
Jozsi **MIKE MURRAY**
Viktor **HAROLD KASKET**

Assistant to the Director:
JEREMY SPENSER

that this theatre has always represented a tradition of polished craftsmanship, both for plays and players. Ferenc Molnar, Hungary's first internationally famous playwright, had likewise started his career at the Vigszinhaz and his plays are still in its repertory. However, theatrical craftsmanship, with parts that virtuoso actors adore, is the only common ground between Orkeny and his predecessor. The intellectual and emotional context of Orkeny's plays is essentially of the present. He furrows for the problems hidden beneath the surface of contemporary attitudes — whether such surfaces are smooth or rough, bourgeois hypocrisies or working-class limitations. In any setting, Orkeny's material is the emotional matrix provided by family life and other fortuitous relationships.

Within this matrix, Orkeny the humanist puts to the test all kinds of ideas; and while he rejects any that can be turned into shibboleths, he still believes in the commitment to action. It is useless action, born of despair, which brings his plots so near to the surrealist or the grotesque. As Orkeny said: "...Action is man's last and only hope. In the context of the grotesque, this means that one must act even when the action in itself is senseless or aimless... For me, writing is a mental state akin to a military leader's on a campaign of conquest. I too want to conquer something, usually something small, mostly just a few feet

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AFTER-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSIONS

For *Catsplay*

Tuesday 30 October and
Thursday 15 November

The first discussion is sponsored by

Deaconess Elsie Baker, chairman of the
West Greenwich Group of Churches

CREDITS

Setting built by Frank Millman
Metalwork by Enterprise Metal Co
Projector by Theatre Projects Lighting Ltd

Telephones by the Post Office
Furniture by the Royal Circus Tea Warehouse
Food by Lockwoods Food Ltd
Stationery by John Dickinson Ltd
Miss Rawlings' Wig by Wig Creations

Silver ink well and paper knife kindly loaned
by "Hundred and One," 101 Notting Hill Gate

of ground, for my own. That's all I want to take from nothingness, from being undefined. I have a vague feeling that whatever we have not yet managed to define, to express, may weaken or destroy, like the virus of an unknown disease. When a thing is clearly stated, precisely expressed, it's no longer harmful. In fact, it may even be of some benefit to mankind."

MARI KUTTNA was born in Hungary, but her family emigrated in 1947. She grew up in Australia and acquired as literary an education as was available, together with a post-graduate scholarship to Oxford for research on "English Stage Comedy, 1624-1642." After Oxford and various London jobs she now works freelance as a journalist and translator.

THE CAST

ELIZABETH BERGNER, to whom over a full page is devoted in the Theatre *Who's Who*, was born in Vienna. Her first major role was as Ophelia in Zurich, where she also played Rosalind. She went on to play in Vienna, Munich and Berlin, where she first appeared under the direction of Max Reinhardt. International recognition came with her Saint Joan in 1924 and shortly after this she began her film career in Paris.

Miss Bergner's first appearance in England was at the Manchester Opera House. Under C B Cochran's direction she played Gemma Jones in *Escape Me Never*. This transferred to the Apollo in December of the same year and was an instant success, going on to New York in 1935. Three years later at Malvern English audiences were given the opportunity to see her Saint Joan before this was also seen in the United States. After a considerable variety of work in that country she returned to England in 1950, again to the Manchester Opera House, playing in *The Gay Invalid* which went to the Garrick in the following year.

A truly international actress, Miss Bergner now lives in London. In 1963 she became the first actress to receive the Schiller Prize, and in the same year and two years later she received the *Goldeneband* of the Berlin International Film Festival. Her recreations are listed as walking and music.

MAGGIE FITZGIBBON

Australian born Maggie Fitzgibbon started her career in her own country in variety and cabaret, and played Bianca in *KISS ME KATE*. Upon her arrival in this country she performed at Winstons for a year with Danny La Rue. She returned to Australia to play the lead in *SAIL AWAY*, directed by Noel Coward. Also in Australia she starred in 1972 in *WHO KILLED SANTA CLAUS*.

She has played for a year at the Pigalle, and the opening show at Talk of the Town. Her many appearances in musicals include Leslie Bricusse's *LADY AT THE WHEEL*, *KOOKABURRA*, *DON'T SHOOT WE'RE ENGLISH*, *ROSE MARIE DO RE MI*, and *THE BOYS FROM SYRACUSE*. Last year she starred in the Chichester Festival's *BEGGAR'S OPERA*.

Her many television appearances have included such popular programmes as the *Newcomers*, *Manhunt*, *Stars on Sunday* and *Country Matters*. In 1971 she was hostess on her own show, *Maggie's Place*. She has recently completed the film *SUNSTRUCK* in which she plays opposite Harry Secombe.

HAROLD KASKET

Began his career in ENSA and has since played in many film, television and stage productions. In 1948-50 he worked with the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, touring Australia and Germany with them. In the early fifties he played in the film *MOULIN ROUGE*, and on stage in *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT* and *THE BESPOKE OVERCOAT*. He then went to the Old Vic in 1955/56 and followed this with more film roles.

Mr Kasket played Max in *SOUND OF MUSIC*, for 1665 performances at the Palace. He has since appeared in *HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL*, the tour of *THE ALCHEMIST* for the Cambridge Theatre Company, 1776 at the Alberty, in the musical *MAYBE THAT'S YOUR PROBLEM* at the Roundhouse, and *AWAKE AND SING* at the Hampstead Theatre Club. Last year he played in the Chichester Festival.

Television work includes *THE RIVALS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES*, *SPECIAL BRANCH*, *BUDGIE*, *GENERAL HOSPITAL*, and *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT*.

PENELOPE KEITH

Penelope Keith began her career in repertory and her first important opportunity came when she joined the Royal Shakespeare Company for seasons at Stratford-upon-Avon and the Aldwych Theatre. Although during this period she had played a number of small parts on television it was in Granada Television's *SIX SHADES OF BLACK* that she had her first leading role. Since then she has played many leading roles on television but is probably most widely known for her performance as Wenda Padbury, one of the central characters in Yorkshire television's series *KATE*. Her films include *A TOUCH OF LOVE*, *TAKE A GIRL LIKE YOU*, *EVERY HOME SHOULD HAVE ONE*, and, most recently, *GHOST STORY*. This will be her second performance with Company Theatre at Greenwich.

CHERRY MORRIS

Married to Mike Murray, with whom she has produced a recital programme, *BLOSSOM IMPERIAL*, Cherry Morris trained at RADA, appeared at leading regional theatres before coming to the Royal Court in *THE WESKER TRILOGY*. With the Royal Shakespeare Company from 1961-64 at Stratford and the Aldwych she played, amongst other parts, Queen Margaret in *THE WARS OF THE ROSES*. At the Edinburgh Festival in 1966 she played in Pop Theatre's *THE TROJAN WOMEN* and *THE WINTER'S TALE*, was in the latter at the Cambridge Theatre, London and Fenice Theatre, Venice. She has also played at the Lyceum Edinburgh and Northcott Exeter, where she was directed by Robin Phillips as Helena in *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* and Varya in *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*.

Many television appearances include *PUBLIC EYE*, *SOFTLY SOFTLY*, *THE BASTARD KING*, *OWEN MD*, *SUSPICION*, *SPORTING TALES* and *FAREWELL*, *AGGIE WESTON*, the last two not yet shown.

MARGARET RAWLINGS

Miss Rawlings made her first professional appearance as Jennifer in *THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA* in 1927. This was in the Shaw Repertory Company with Esme Percy. She was to play much Shaw in the next few years, touring in 1929/30 to North America in Shaw Repertory. Many appearances in the West End and New York followed, as well as in Paris and Australia.

She remembers as a landmark the part of Katharine O'Shea in *PARNELL*, which she played in 1935 at Norman Marshall's Gate Theatre and at the New. Two years later came two more well-liked parts in the thriller *BLACK LIMELIGHT*, which ran for over a year. In 1938 she played Karen Selby in *THE FLASHING STREAM* by Charles Morgan, at the Lyric Theatre and in New York. Another favourite was her appearance in an all-star revival of *DEAR BRUTUS* at the Globe in 1941.

Miss Rawlings took time out to marry and have a daughter - who now has a son and daughter of her own. She was in Michael Benthall's first production, *THE WHITE DEVIL* at the Duchess, in Guthrie's *TAMBURLAINE*, and also had a season at the Old Vic. More recently she was in another star revival - of *GETTING MARRIED* at the Strand. Her husband's ill-health has meant limiting her appearances to short runs and television: two of these being in *WIVES AND DAUGHTERS* and *DRAGON'S OPPONENT*.

Biographies of *MIKE MURRAY* and *JOHN ROGAN* appeared in the last edition of *CUE*