

programme



The Gay Beggars present: Caryl Churchill's

VINEGAR TOM

Directors' Note

Heidi Haas: From the moment I had made up my mind to direct a play I knew it would have to be something unapologetically feminist. It didn't take long for me to come across Caryl Churchill and her many plays. *Vinegar Tom* fulfilled all my superficial criteria: a decent cast size, a good length, not too well known yet not too obscure and, of course, feminist. I knew I had found a timely piece, after all, the #metoo movement had catapulted discussions of violence, sexual abuse and consent into the mainstream. When I had started my studies in 2008, feminism was still used as if it were a dirty word and now, only 10 years on, so many women, and men, were proud to call themselves feminists. Of course, being a complete musical theater geek, the fact that *Vinegar Tom* also incorporated songs made it even more enticing. Here was a play highlighting not only the disastrous results of sexism, but also commenting on how wealth can affect the outcome; the wannabe sociologist in me started skipping happily. *Vinegar Tom* has captivated me in the most wonderful way, and I continue seeing new nuances even now. I hope it may do the same for you.

Jonathan Tadres: Caryl Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* is a profoundly challenging literary text. Whether you're a reader, an actress, a director, or a spectator: The language, the imagery, the voyeurism and the aestheticized violence will leave you equally bewildered and entertained. In that sense, *Vinegar Tom* is a political drama in the best sense: Highly self-reflexive, brutality and absurd amusement are melted into an exciting and self-contained plot whose powerful language resounds with accuracy and a perverse sense of humor. When Heidi asked me to co-direct this year's spring production with her, I knew that the transposition of this very ambivalence onto the stage would be our greatest challenge. But even then, the text seemed too good to be scared of it, and now, six months later, I'm very proud to say that this production has remained mostly faithful to the original text and its relentless, multi-layered reflexivity. I hope this beautiful, feminist tragedy and its many pointed fingers, its numerous victims and abundant culprits will leave you at a loss for explanations.

When we started out with this production, we couldn't have imagined how incredible an adventure it would ultimately be. Our production feeds off the hard work of each and every one of our cast members. They breathed life into their character(s), and we are thankful for their continued efforts and enthusiasm and excited for you to see the results. Our singers, together with our musical director, Jonas Biedermann, wrote a score that was more beautiful and haunting than we could have dreamed of. Their voices, each unique, came together to create the sound you will hear tonight (and possibly for another while thereafter). We are immensely grateful for this experience and proud of our final product. Now, it is time for us, and you, to sit back and enjoy.



About the play & its author

Caryl Churchill is a British playwright whose writing revolves predominantly around the themes of feminism and power. Churchill has written plays for the theatre stage, as well as for radio and television. *Vinegar Tom* was created in 1976, in collaboration with the feminist theatre group "Monstrous Regiment" and, like many of her plays, deals with themes like misogyny, power relations, oppression, self-determination, and 'witchcraft'. Churchill herself describes it as "a play about witches with no witches in it; [...] about poverty, humiliation and prejudice," intending to show how witchcraft was used to push the blame for any troubles and abnormalities onto the women at the margins of society.

The play is set in 17th century England during the period of witchcraft trials. It portrays seven women with different social backgrounds and their relationships with each other and the men around them. As these mothers, daughters, wives, friends and assistants deal with the daily struggles of their lives, the constant fear and threat of witchcraft hangs over them, whether they are the accusers or the accused.

In a small English village, a conflict erupts between the non-conforming Joan and Alice and their conservative neighbours, Margery and Jack. After facing economic and marital troubles, the latter quickly accuse the two women of witchcraft, convinced that Joan's cat, *Vinegar Tom*, is her familiar sent by the devil. Susan, Alice's friend, and Ellen, the village's cunning woman, are later confronted with the same accusations. In pursuit of justice, the witch hunters Packer and Goody set out to discover and punish all the witches in the village and reinstate peace.

The music for the songs accompanying certain scenes was written by our very own musical team. The performance of these songs – that serve as a commentary on the story and underline the meaning of the respective scenes – is intended to connect the 17th century setting, the 1970s period of the play's creation and our modern-day world.

**Licht aus.
Vorhang auf.
 **Geniessen.****

The Cast:



Elias Kraus is a Jack of all trades in many regards: From running, dancing and climbing, part-time hairdressing, and studying medicine, he also manages to make time for acting. He describes his relationship to his character Jack as complicated, though he has a decent amount of compassion for him. This is his third Beggars production, which has given him the confidence to openly eat kiwis without peeling them and wear the tightest shirts he can find.

“It can happen to anyone!”

Julia Brosi has played a witch and part-time warrior queen in *Lords and Ladies* a couple of years ago. She is excited to explore a rather darker take on witchcraft, authority and violence in our current production. Apart from her acting and occasional directing duties, she is our expert-in-residence on the dark arts of social media.



“Don’t always talk of men!”



Laurence Sauter is close-knitted to the Beggars. Acting and directing with the group made her chase after her dream and become a theatre professional (directing - yayy!!). She’s excited about this play’s cool strong female parts. Her spiritual soul, her deep understanding for people, and her connection to nature (she names all her plants) are, (be aware!) quite witchy.

“Clever girl like you could think of other things”

The directors actually gave **Sarah Wicki (left)** permission to try method acting for this play and come drunk to the rehearsals. We'll keep quiet about whether she did it or not. When she is not borrowing people's bowls (and not giving them back), she teaches children all they need to know about mammoths. Apart from acting, Sarah enjoys hiking, climbing and playing frisbee.



Alexandra Grasso (right) is currently doing her Master's in English and German Literature. This is her third production with the Beggars and she enjoys pursuing theatre as a hobby in a group that's so open and welcoming. An impressive achievement of Alex' is once smashing two windows in the span of one minute. The details of this event are left up to your imagination.

"If you'd my troubles, Margery, you'd be glad of a drink."

"There's no way for us except by the devil."

Maria Ionescu studies English and Media Science here in Basel. She was in a few plays in high school and this is her second production with the Beggars. Compared to last year's comedy extravaganza this is a much darker production and Maria was eager to explore that contrast and be part of a completely different kind of play. She really enjoys the atmosphere and energy of the collaborative process that theater entails and likes to challenge herself creatively.



"Because I was screaming!"

Nicolas Allenspach is on a neverending quest to conquer the world of exquisit beverages. He has lived through several near-death experiences thanks to coconut water, bael-fruit and other hellish potions. Therefore his interest in Dungeons & Dragons can be seen as a strong and long-lasting side-effect or as a therapeutic means to put the horrors of the past into perspective.



"What it is, you didn't see my feet."



Rahel Brügger is a Kindergarten teacher with 8 years of theatre experience and a DIY attitude. She may not actually believe in witches and curses but when she is on stage, she might just fool you. This is a testament of the enthusiasm she brings with her and a great addition to the play. It is always fun to see her on stage and be amazed by how she seamlessly transforms into her role.

"I've been a good neighbour to that woman years out of mind and no return."

Soraya Streib Ladner has been supporting the Beggars for the last two plays behind the scenes. This spring she joins us on stage as Goody, the intimidating assistant of Packer. No one can wear a ruff as gracefully as her. But witches beware, she'll find your spot! In her free time, Soraya likes running, doing Krav Maga; tends to fall off Motorcycles and hits the Gym regularly!



"It's for your own good, you know, to save you from the devil."



After her first introduction to the Beggars with the fun fairytale mashup last year, 28 year old **Silja Keller** ventures onto new and much darker ground. She's excited to be able to use her singing skills in a completely new way, being classically trained. Silja loves meeting new people and connecting on a spiritual level, which brings her theology studies from the science back down into the human heart and soul.

*“Look in the mirror tonight,
would they have hanged you then?”*

Shannon Hughes is a self-proclaimed uncool kid, though others tend to disagree. She used to be the devil, now she works at the Basel Tourist Office and studies History as well as English. She is very much into song writing and music, which she preferably listens to while being at the Merian Gardens. All adjectives commonly used in energy-drink-commercials apply to her, too. This is her second production with the Beggars.



*“I shut my eyes and I opened wide,
but why is my heart on the other side?”*

Xander Deubelbeiss has been a mainstay of the Gay Beggars for a long time, taking part in a large number of varied productions throughout his time here. Always helpful and offering a hand, he's partial to puns, references unfortunately doomed to go over the heads of the younger Beggars, and singing - which, while not being the first time he does so on stage, is the first time he is doing so to music he helped compose.



“No-one loves you unless you keep your mouth shut.”

Die Sortimentsbuchhandlung für Geisteswissenschaften, Belletristik & Lyrik.

Bei uns steht auch der LITERATURAUTOMAT.



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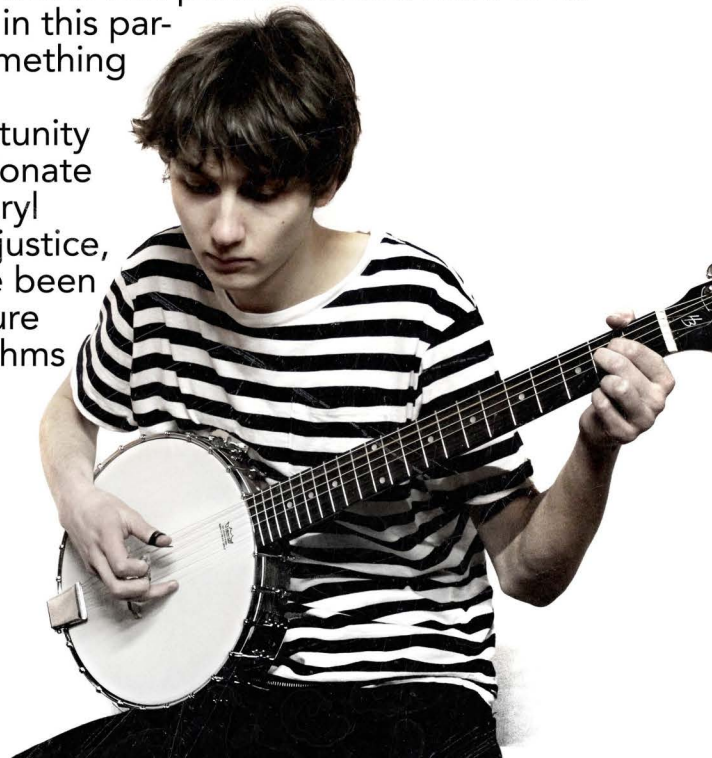
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A musical note from **Jonas Biedermann**:

A large part of the emotional and thematic weight of *Vinegar Tom* is carried by seven songs. Turning these from words on a page to performance-ready music has been the focus of the ~~musical support group~~ music team for the past two months. My official title of 'musical director', though useful for deflecting questions about staging („I don't know, I'm just the *musical* director"), belies the collaborative nature of our workflow (not to mention how hopelessly comical it would be for a 19-year-old freshman to 'directorially' boss veteran Beggars around). Working together, we all bounced ideas off each other, discussed how best to turn these ideas into full-fledged songs, the songs into arrangements and those into performances. Each of us has a different musical background, and working in this particular production was, in one way or another, something new for each member of 'Team Noisy'.

I am extremely grateful for having had the opportunity to work with such skilled musicians and compassionate people. Though it has been a challenge to do Caryl Churchill's wonderful and brutally candid writing justice, it is immensely gratifying to see everything we've been working towards fall into place. We tried to capture the raw emotion of the play in our melodies, rhythms and harmonies. If it feels like a punch in the gut, we've succeeded.

PS: No promises, but there is a non-zero chance we'll record the music and publish it after the shows. If you liked what you heard and could do with hearing it again, consider signing up for our newsletter on www.gaybeggars.ch to be notified if / when such a thing should happen.



cast

Joan	Sarah Wicki
Susan	Julia Brosi
Alice	Alexandra Grasso
Goody	Soraya Streib Ladner
Betty	Maria Ionescu
Margery	Rahel Brügger
Ellen (cunning woman)	Laurence Sauter
Jack	Elias Kraus
Man, Doctor, Packer	Nicolas Allenspach
Kramer & Sprenger	Julia Brosi & Maria Ionescu
Singer	Silja Keller
Singer	Xander Deubelbeiss
Singer	Shannon Hughes

behind the scenes

Directors	Heidi Haas & Jonathan Tadres
Musical Director	Jonas Biedermann
Costumes	Flurina Wyss
Make-Up	Katja Siegrist
Lights	Nicolas Hunziker
Poster and Flyers Design	Gaby Haas & Jonas Biedermann
Programme Editing	Jonas Biedermann
PR and Social Media	Julia Brosi
Sponsoring	Soraya Streib Ladner
Vocal Coach	Liv Grossenbacher

music

Lyrics	Caryl Churchill
Composition	Jonas Biedermann & Singers, Heidi Haas
Piano / Organ	Elias Kraus & Jonas Biedermann
Percussion	Heidi Haas & Jonas Biedermann
Recorder	Silja Keller
Banjo guitar	Jonas Biedermann

A very special thank you goes to the keeper of keys, **Alex Van Lierde**, for his ongoing support of not only this production but the Gay Beggars in general. Thank you for putting up with our craziness.

We would also like to thank **Elisa Rutschi** and **Valens Wullschleger** for helping us construct everything we needed for the hanging scene.

Our thanks also go to **Roman Bischof** who continues to update our website and support us in many other ways, as well as to **Xander Deubelbeiss** for all of his help with lights and constructions.

Lastly, we want to thank all the people who so generously offered their help with our bar and box office and **Soraya** and **Maria** for organising everything.

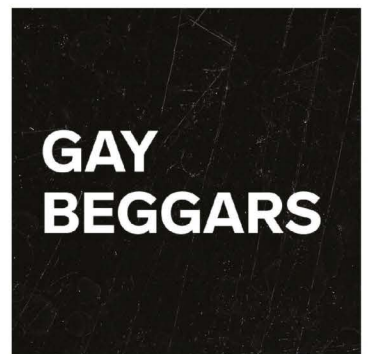
Eager to join us?

We are already planning our next project.

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2: OH DOCTOR

1: NOBODY SINGS

*I woke up in the morning,
Blood was on the sheet,
I looked at all the women,
When I passed them in the street.*

*Nobody sings about it,
but it happens all the time.*

*I met an old old woman
Who made my blood run cold.
You don't stop wanting sex, she said,
Just because you're old.*

*Nobody sings about it,
but it happens all the time.
Nobody sings about it,
but it happens
all the time.*

*I could be glad of the change of life,
But it makes me feel so strange.
If your life is being wanted
Do you want your life to change?*

*Do you want your skin to wrinkle
And your cunt get sore and dry?
And they say it's just your hormones
If you cry and cry and cry.*

*Nobody sings about it,
but it happens all the time.
Nobody sings about it,
but it happens
all the time.*

*Nobody ever saw me,
She whispered in a rage.
They were blinded by my beauty, now
They're blinded by my age.*

*Nobody sings about it,
but it happens all the time.
Nobody sings about it,
but it happens all the time.*

*[Chorus:]
Oh, doctor, tell
me, make me well.
What's wrong with me
the way I am?
I know I'm sad.
I may be sick.
I may be bad.
Please cure me quick,
oh doctor. [x2]*

*Where are you taking my skin?
Where are you putting my bones?
I shut my eyes and I opened wide,
But why is my heart on the other side?
Why are you putting my brain in my cunt?
You're putting me back all back to front.*

*Stop looking up me with your metal eye.
Stop cutting me open before I die.
Stop, put me back.
Stop, put me back.
Put back my body.*

*Who are you giving my womb?
Who are you showing my breath?
Tell me what you whisper to nurse,
Whatever I've got, you're making it worse.
I'm wide awake, but I still can't shout.
Why can't I see what you're taking out?*

*Stop looking up me with your metal eye.
Stop cutting me open before I die.
Stop, put me back.
Stop, put me back.
Put back my body.*

*[Chorus]
What's wrong with me the way I am?
What's wrong with me?*

*I want to see myself.
I want to see inside myself.
Give me back my head.
I'll put my heart in straight.
Let me out of bed now.
I can't wait
To see myself.
Give me back my body.
I can see myself.*

3: SOMETHING TO BURN

*What can we do, there's nothing to do,
'bout sickness and hunger and dying.
What can we do, there's nothing to do,
nothing but cursing and crying.*

*Find something to burn,
let it go up in smoke. [x3]
Burn your troubles away.*

*Sometimes it's witches, or what will you choose?
Sometimes it's lunatics, shut them away.
It's blacks and it's women and often it's Jews
We'd all be quite happy if they'd go away.*

*Find something to burn,
let it go up in smoke. [x3]
Burn your troubles away.*

4: IF EVERYBODY WORKED AS HARD AS ME

*If everybody worked as hard as me,
if our children's shirts are white,
if their language is polite,
if no one stays out late at night,
Oh, happy family.*

*[Chorus:]
Oh, the country's what it is because
the family's what it is because
the wife is what she is
to her man.*

*Oh I do all I can.
Yes, I do all I can.
I try to do what's right,
so I'll never be alone
And not afraid in the night.*

*Nobody loves a scold,
nobody loves a slut,
nobody loves you when you're old,
unless you're someone's gran.
No one loves you
unless you keep your mouth shut.
No one loves you
if you don't support your man.
Oh you can [x2]*

*Yes you can
have a happy family.*

*If everybody worked as hard as me,
sometimes you'll be bored,
you'll often be ignored,
but in your heart you'll know you are adored.*

*Oh, happy family.
Your dreams will all come true.
And you'll make your country strong.*

[Chorus]

*Oh please do all you can.
Yes, please do all you can
Oh, please don't do what's wrong,
so you'll never be alone
and afraid in the night.
So nobody comes knocking
at your door in the night.
So the horrors that are done
will not be done to you.*

Yes you can. [x4]

[Chorus]

5: IF YOU FLOAT

If you float you're a witch,
If you scream you're a witch
If you sink, then you're dead anyway.
If you cure you're a witch
Or unpure you're a witch
Whatever you do, you must pay.

Fingers are pointed, a knock at the door,
You may be a mother, a child or a whore.

You complain you're a witch
Or you're lame you're a witch
Any marks or deviations count for more.
Got big tits you're a witch
Fall to bits you're a witch
He likes them young, promiscuous and poor.

Fingers are pointed, a knock at the door,
They're coming to get you, do you know what for?

So don't drop a stitch
My poor little bitch
If you're making a spell
Do it well
Deny it you're bad
Admit it you're mad
Say nothing at all
and they'll damn you to hell.

If you float
If you scream
If you sink, then you're dead anyway.

If you cure
Or unpure
Whatever you do,
you must pay.

6: LAMENT FOR THE WITCHES

Where have the witches gone?
And who are the witches now?
Here we are.

All the good witches' spells
blast the doctors' sleeping pills.
The witches hanging in the sky
haunt the courts where lawyers lie.
Here we are.

They were gentle witches
with healing spells
They were desperate witches
with no way out
but the other side of hell.

A witch's crying in the night
switches out your children's light.
And all your houses safe and warm
are struck by the witches' storm.
Here we are.

Where have the witches gone?
And who are the witches now?
Here we are.

They were gentle witches
with healing spells
They were desperate witches
with no way out but the other side of hell.

Where have the witches gone?
Who are the witches now?
Ask how they're stopping you now.
Here we are.

Look in the mirror tonight.
Would they have hanged you then?
Ask how they're stopping you now.
Here we are.

7: EVIL WOMEN

*Evil women
Is that what you want?
Is that what you want to see?
On the movie screen
Of your own wet dream
Evil women.*

*If you like sex sinful, what you want is us.
You can be sucked off by a succubus.
We had this man, and afterwards he died.*

*Does she do what she's told or does she nag?
Are you cornered in the kitchen by a bitching hag?*

*Satan's lady, Satan's pride.
Satan's baby, Satan's bride,
A devil woman's not easily satisfied.*

*Are you ever afraid
You don't do it right?
Does your lady demand it
Three times a night?
If we don't say you're big
Do you start to shrink?
We earn our own money
And buy our own drink.*

*Did you learn you were dirty boys, did you learn
Women were wicked to make you burn?*

*Satan's lady, Satan's pride,
Satan's baby, Satan's bride,
Witches were wicked and had to burn.*

*Evil women
Is that what you want?
Is that what you want to see?
In your movie dream
Do they scream and scream?
Evil women.
Evil women.
Women.*

