

The Gay Beggars Drama Group
Department of English, Basel University

Molière's

THE HYPOCHONDRIAC

translated by John Wood



Programme

Director's note

Why stage a French play in English? Because it's fun! Is that the only reason? Yes! Really? Well, let me elaborate... Last summer, when I was searching for a play for this year's spring production, I came across John Wood's translation of *Le malade imaginaire*. I didn't really consider it as a play for the Gay Beggars but I had read and loved the French original and I was curious how the translation would work. When I finished it, I realised that a) I had read through it really quickly (well, for my standards) because I had been barely able to put it down and b) that I hadn't come across one character I wouldn't want to play myself if we staged this. This, along with the witty dialogues and the suspenseful story, made this play my first choice. I wanted to be able to give everyone of the cast a role that they could put all their heart in. And it worked: I'm extremely excited about the way each character is portrayed.

In the beginning, right after casting was done, I said that however good or bad I am going to prove myself as a director, with this cast the play can only turn out great. Now, four months later, I know I was right about that. In addition, I can say that I am very grateful to have had Xander as my co-director. I profited a lot by his experience and I think we made a really great team.

Being part of the Gay Beggars, whether as an actor or as director, has been an amazing experience for me from the start and these last few months of putting together *The Hypochondriac* were no exception. I hope the audience will enjoy watching the performances of the play as much as I enjoyed rehearsing it. Then, the production was a success in all respects.

Roman Bischof

half of the directorial team

Special Thanks

A Gay Beggars production wouldn't be a Gay Beggars production without great costumes, and Claudia has once again done an awesome job, first by designing and producing wonderful wearables and second by introducing Alessia to the Beggars as her assistant. We're very grateful to both of them!

Once again, we are very grateful for the support by the English Seminar and especially Alex Van Lierde, who does so many important things for us that it is hard to list them all. We wouldn't know what we'd do without you, Alex!

Last but not least we would like to thank Fränzi for organising bar and box office (and helping with many other things) and all the helpers she has acquired for this. It's great to have so many good souls among us who help us make all this happen!

Molière

In 1641, 19-year-old Jean-Baptiste Poquelin seemed to be headed for a comfortable if unexciting life: He was licenced to practise law, and expected to do just that until the time he would take over his father's position of *tapissier valet de chambre du Roi* – a sort of interior decorator to His Majesty.

But plans began to change rapidly after he met actress Madeleine Béjart. With Madeleine, her siblings, and another few comédiens, he founded *L'illustre Théâtre* in Paris in 1643. That company was bankrupt within two years, but most of the actors went on together to join another company touring in southern France. By this time Poquelin was using the name 'de Molière', in keeping with a fad in theatre circles of claiming an obviously fake title of nobility.

Molière thrived in these 'provincial' years. Not only was he one of the star actors, he also soon became the nominal leader of the company. In addition he began to write his own plays. By 1656, when the company's noble patron died and the successor to his title cut off their funding, Molière's troupe was considered one of the leading French theatres outside Paris. They decided to take another shot at the capital, and in due time managed to enter the services of *Monsieur*: Philippe d'Orléans, Louis XIV's younger brother. The young king himself enjoyed their performances and supported the company, but with the increased visibility from all this royal attention, Molière became the focus of a whole series of scandals.

The first concerned his 1662 marriage to Armande Béjart. It might not have raised all that many eyebrows that she was half his age at the time of the wedding, but gossips were quick to point out that his old lover Madeleine's 'younger sister' was more likely her daughter; possibly even Molière's. Soon after this his play *l'École des femmes* caused moral indignation with its veiled reference to two characters' extramarital hanky-panky, and when Molière satirised devout hypocrites in *Tartuffe*, the king banned public performances (though he ordered another private showing for his own court), and the Archbishop of Paris threatened the whole cast with excommunication when they tried to stage a defused adaptation.

Another conflict affected not only public reception but Molière's work itself: His company had long integrated music and dance into their spectacles, and for nine years he had collaborated with the king's favourite composer, Jean-Baptiste Lully. Both considered that an Italian-style opera in French would be impossible. When *Pomone* by Robert Cambert proved them wrong, Lully immediately muscled in on the new territory and obtained a royal monopoly on any play involving music. Molière protested and received permission to use a small number of musicians, but by opposing Lully he had effectively lost the rights to the music for most of his *comédies-ballets*. The scores for his last plays, as well as replacement music for a few earlier works, would be written by Marc-Antoine Charpentier.

Le malade imaginaire is Molière's last play. He had been increasingly weakened by a lung infection, and his performance as Argan was that of an ill man pretending to be a healthy man pretending to be an ill man. Molière died on February 17th 1673, a few hours after coughing his way through the fourth performance of the play.



Roy Fischer – Argan

Apart from displaying impeccable style at any moment of the day, Roy is the most kind-hearted person in the country, or possibly the planet. He likes cuddles, chocolate and mayonnaise, though not the combination of two or more of these. He also holds a nearly unbeatable record for most washed dishes per rehearsal camp attended.



Johanna Schüpbach – Toinette

Johanna has been populating both sides of the Beggars' stage for several years now: the light side in *Unexpected Returns*, *Noises Off* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*, and the dark side as co-director of *Gallathea*. She is loved for her sunny spirit and her general cuddleability, and everyone is in awe of her mad skills with the eye-shadow brush. Furthermore she kicks several varieties of ass at such diverse games as Halli Galli and Werewolf.



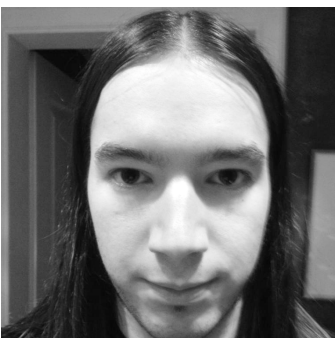
Lesley Loew – Angélique

After her debut in the director's chair of last year's *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Lesley now decided to join the Beggars again on the on-stage side. So far, she hasn't regretted it and is enjoying fun, food and fulfilment. She occasionally mistakes puppies for plums, but to be fair they can be confusingly similar in some lights.



Helena Müller – Béline

Equip a graceful person with a big heart and an unerring sense of fashion, add a good dose of culinary expertise and a pinch of mischief, and top off the whole ensemble with a flood of wavy golden hair. Voilà – there's all the reason you need to take an army to Troy. Under cover of darkness and using an enormous wooden duck we managed to sneak her off to our side a few years ago, and we haven't regretted it for a second.



Franc Fritschi – M. de Bonnefoi / M. Fleurant / snare drum

Our latest Man in Black has a lot of experience in the business of hitting objects with sticks. As a drummer he is also competent at multitasking, which can be useful when called on to turn from a stressed-out apothecary into a self-assured notary at a moment's notice.

**Nicolas "Hunzi" Hunziker – Cléante**

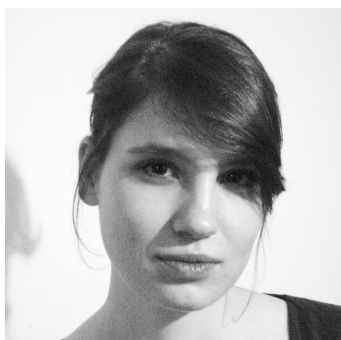
Not much has changed in five productions with Hunzi: he still has a knack for the more pleasurable things in life such as women, beverages of the alcoholic sort, music of questionable taste and creeping everyone around him out. Hopefully this new-found part in *The Hypochondriac* (although once again, slightly typecast) will finally give him a chance to get in touch with more important things in life – or to successfully continue as before.

**Karolina Kowalska – Dr. Diafoirus**

Karolina's recent dramatic achievements include stealing the show in *Gallathea* with a last-minute entrance as the Goddess of Love, directing the more than slightly challenging farce *Noises Off*, and quietly partying harder than anyone else in *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Her warm-hearted generosity is one of the pillars of the Beggars experience.

**Pablo Arnaiz – Thomas Diafoirus / Guardsman / Monkey**

Since he enjoyed playing the choleric Garry in last year's *Noises Off* on stage and appreciated the non-choleric atmosphere backstage, Pablo just could not resist joining the Beggars again for *The Hypochondriac*. This time there are no stairs to run up and down, but once again Pablo's character is not the strongest in the wit, brains or confidence departments.

**Julia Kowalska - Louison**

Though new to the stage, Jules is no stranger to this group. She has provided food, assisted as a stagehand, and designed the posters and flyers for several productions including this one. Now she has at last exchanged her pencil for an elaborate dress and stepped up to the limelight herself to portray sweet little Louison.

**Jasmin Rindlisbacher – Béraldine**

Rumour has it that Jasmin tends to be typecast. Judge for yourself: She went from being an insecure wannabe boy with no taste in clothing (*Gallathea*) to no clothing at all as the slightly distracted Brooke (*Noises Off*) before she impersonated a rather gossipy party-goer with avian hair accessory (*Lady Windermere's Fan*). Now Jasmin can let her inner consulting and tea-loving sibling shine through in order to get what she wants.



Jorian Pawlowsky – Monsieur Purgeon / Monkey / Guardsman

After his lead role as a stiff-lipped Victorian Lord in the last Beggars production, Jorian felt that it was time to expand his acting horizons. We happily obliged by assigning him a whole assortment of roles. Jorian likes ducks (especially the doomy kind), songs about himself, and eating in slow motion. Also, glitter is nice. Jorian has kindly volunteered to take on the enormous responsibility of directing the Beggars' production of 2014.



Ilenia Ballacchino – voice / bodhrán

After performing in *Unexpected Returns* in 2010 and then deserting to Ireland to take bodhrán lessons from a master beater, she's now back having 'the craic' (fun) with the Gay Beggars and kicking off *The Hypochondriac* with an Irish traditional song, sean-nós style - because that's her way, man.



Laura Vegh – Violin

An experienced actor and director in her own right, this time around Laura wows audiences with yet another of her talents. Since she doesn't get to say a single word in her function as one of the instrumentalists, we make a point of having a brief chat with her after every show so her vocal cords get some small bit of exercise after all.



Fabienne Schwizer – Gypsy girl

Fabienne joined the ranks of Diana's Nymphs for *Gallathea* in 2011. After a bit of a hiatus she now returns to our stage to explain in verse, chorus style, the themes of the plot to those in the audience who could not follow when the same material was presented to them in prose. We confidently expect her to announce her directing aspirations any year now.



Danielle Zammit – Gypsy mother

A citizen of the world, born in Malta and at home in Switzerland, Danielle is only just beginning to discover the many and variegated joys of theatre. In her second acting role so far she is already speaking in verse and dancing with monkeys. We expect great things from her in the future.

**Sam Ammann – Punchinello**

Back for his third Beggars production after *Unexpected Returns* (2010) and *Lady Windermere's Fan* (2012), Sam leaves his adopted Zurich to take to the stage once more.

**Roman Bischof – director**

Having had no theatrical experience before joining the Beggars for *Gallathea*, Roman was immediately drawn into a vicious circle of good food, merriment and the healthy kind of insanity, a circle that is not likely to let go of him any time soon. Thusly, after having acted in the three latest Beggars' productions, he decided (completely voluntarily, cf. Jorian's bio 2014) to join the dark side of the stage for once. And it seems that they have cookies, too.

**Xander Deubelbeiss – director**

Xander has been a Beggar for bloody ages. After years of appearing on stage in about a dozen plays, in recent years he has shifted his focus towards letting the kiddies have a go. Before *The Hypochondriac* he had teamed up with tonight's 'Toinette' to direct the Beggars' 2011 production of *Gallathea*. He is a bottomless well of bad puns and wise-assery and, much like a 17th Century doctor, will always get the better of you.

**Claudia Ott – costume designer**

Claudia's designs have defined the look of several years' worth of Beggars productions. She has also made her mark on the recruiting front: at least one current cast member first started dreaming about joining the Beggars after admiring her work in *Wyrd Sisters*.

**Alessia Ballacchino – costumes**

Alessia joins us for the first time this year, and immediately delivers some astonishing wearabilia. We'll be very sure to hold on to her as tightly as possible.

A brief plot summary

Prologue/Interludes

Punchinello is in love with a young gypsy girl but their secret meetings keep getting interrupted by the gypsy's protective mother, by the guards who want to lock him up, and by music which just will not stop playing.

First Act

Argan is an unhappy hypochondriac: he does not quite get as many treatments as he would like, no one seems to bother when he calls for assistance, and his maid Toinette even has the cheek to talk back to him. At least his daughter Angélique seems to be ready to go along with his plan to have her married - until she finds out that the groom her father has in mind is not the one she fell in love with just a week ago: Instead of her beloved Cléante, Argan wants her to marry Thomas Diafoirus, an aspiring doctor who will hopefully provide him with the medicine and treatments he needs. Toinette attempts in vain to convince Argan that this is not a good idea, but she assures Angélique that she will do everything in her power to help her get out of this predicament.

Meanwhile, Argan's second wife Béline is making sure that Argan's will contains her name and not many others, for which purpose she invited her notary, Monsieur de Bonnefoi, who is willing enough to advise Argan in her favour.

Second Act

The following day, Cléante arrives at Argan's house to talk to Angélique and try to stop the arranged wedding. Cleverly disguised, he introduces himself to Argan as Angélique's substitute singing teacher. When Madame Diafoirus arrives to introduce her son to the family of her soon-to-be daughter-in-law, Cléante's disguise is put to the test when Argan asks him to let Angélique sing something to entertain the company. The lovers however manage to make use of the situation to assure each other of their feelings by making up words and music of an opera that was never written. Argan is as little pleased with the story of the opera as he is with his daughter's attitude towards his plans. When Angélique almost picks a fight with Béline in front of the Diafoiruses, he issues an ultimatum: Either Angélique agrees to marry Thomas Diafoirus or he will put her in a convent. To make things worse, Argan finds out about Cléante's disguise by questioning Angélique's younger sister Louison. The only people Angélique can now rely on are Toinette and Argan's sister Béraldine who is paying her little brother a visit to try and talk some sense into him.

Third Act

Béraldine tries to convince Argan that he does not actually need all this medical attention when Monsieur Fleurant, Argan's apothecary, comes in to give him his next injection. When Béraldine persuades Argan to postpone the treatment, Fleurant runs off to get Argan's doctor, Monsieur Purgeon. The latter is not at all pleased with Argan's obedience to his prescriptions and threatens to abandon him and leave him to die. Luckily, another doctor, who looks suspiciously like Toinette, arrives out of nowhere and offers to look after Argan from time to time. Now the time is right for Toinette's cunning plan to uncover Béline's true intentions and remind Argan of his fatherly feelings for Angélique. And Béraldine might just have the right idea to help Argan get rid of his hypochondria...