



# THE TRIAL

BY

**STEVEN BERKOFF**

**ADAPTED FROM THE STORY BY FRANZ KAFKA**

## Education Pack

Producer **Adrian McDougall** Director **Ella Vale** Design **Victoria Spearing**  
Costume Design **Hannah Gibbs** Lighting Design **Charlotte McClelland**

Blackeyed Theatre	...	...	2
The Cast	...	...	3
Creative Team	...	...	5
Franz Kafka	...	...	6
Steven Berkoff	...	...	8
Character List and Synopsis	...	...	10
Director's note	...	...	12
Physical Theatre	...	...	13
Original Production	...	...	15
Berkoff Foreword	...	...	16
Post Show Notes	...	...	18



© Blackeyed Theatre, 2012.

This pack may be photocopied and distributed for educational purposes only.  
Republishing in any form is prohibited.



# Blackeyed Theatre

Blackeyed Theatre is a mid-scale touring theatre company established in 2004 to create exciting opportunities for artists and audiences alike, and to offer challenging, high quality theatre to the mid-scale touring circuit.

The company specialises in reviving modern classics and staging established titles in innovative ways, using small ensembles of actor/musicians to create theatre that is audacious, fresh and far bigger than the sum of its parts. Since 2004, Blackeyed Theatre has embarked on national tours of [Alfie](#) (Bill Naughton), [The Cherry Orchard](#) (Anton Chekhov), [The Caucasian Chalk Circle](#) (Bertolt Brecht), the world premiere of [Oedipus](#) (Steven Berkoff) and [The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui](#) (Bertolt Brecht).

In 2009, Blackeyed Theatre became an associate company of South Hill Park Arts Centre. In 2008, the company produced its first Christmas show, [A Christmas Carol](#), and a year later [Peter Pan](#).

In 2011, Blackeyed Theatre launched its first new writing scheme, **Pulse**, with the intention to provide a new writer with the opportunity to see their work produced professionally on stage. [The Beekeeper](#), written by Michael Ashton, was produced this autumn at South Hill Park Arts Centre, and sold 94% of the tickets in its run. It will be moved to a London Fringe venue in 2012 for a three week run.

Blackeyed Theatre is totally self-sufficient and receives no funding for its published productions, creating innovative, challenging theatre that's also commercially viable. It achieves this by producing work that audiences want to see but in ways that challenge their expectations, by bringing together artists with a genuine passion for the work they produce, and through an appreciation that works of art with a mass appeal do not have to be presented in a dumbed-down way. By offering a theatrical experience that's both artistically excellent and affordable, audiences and theatres are far more sustainable in the long term. And responding to demand ensures that more people see innovative theatre.

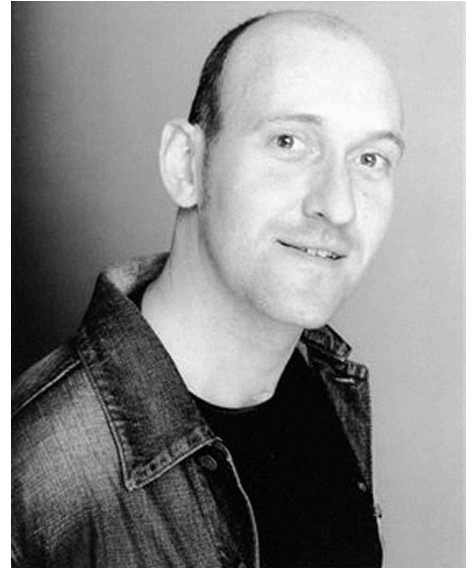
Blackeyed Theatre has a growing national reputation for creating dynamic theatre using live music and great performances to tell stories with honesty and passion.

# The Cast

## **Derek Elwood - Inspector / Whipper / Father / Huld / Chorus**

Derek trained at Arts Educational, London, and has a wide range of theatrical credits to his name, including Tiresias in **Oedipus** (Blackeyed Theatre) and Mr Twit in **The Twits** at The Dukes, Lancaster. His other stage credits include **Clown** (Travelling Light), **Pinocchio** (mac - Midlands Arts Centre), **Gulliver's Travels** (MakeBelieve Arts), **Arabian Nights...and Days** (Shifting Sands), **The Man Next Door** (Hoipolloi), **Faust** (Burning Cat Productions), **Jack Drum's Entertainment** (Work In Progress Theatre Company), **Malvolio's Revenge** (Works Well Productions), **Twelfth Night** (Maqama Theatre Company), **Richard III** (UQ Productions), **Lucky Winner** (Wildtune Productions), **Alice In Wonderland** (Giddy Kipper Productions), **Richard III** (Broken Ruler).

Derek has also performed street theatre with the Natural Theatre Company and Lightening Ensemble. Film and television credits include **Centenary**, **Jack the Ripper: An Ongoing Mystery** and **Don't Walk**.



## **Nadia Morgan - Mrs Grubach / Elsa / Laundress / Leni / Chorus**

Nadia studied at UCL and trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama. She recently appeared as Hermione in **The Winter's Tale**, at the Mercury Theatre Colchester. Other recent work includes **The Gypsy Bible** – a new 'folk opera' for Opera North, and **Grimm Tales** at Theatre by the Lake, in Keswick.

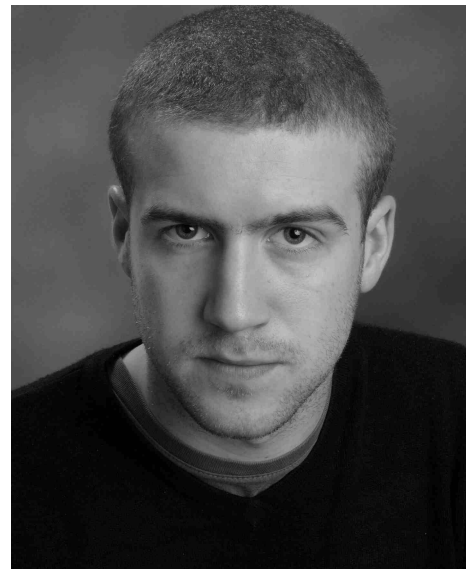
For the National Theatre education: Helena and Flute in **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, and various roles in **Macbeth**. For Opera North: the Mute in **The Abduction** from the Seraglio. Also for the Mercury Theatre, Colchester: Julia in **The Rivals**; Iphigenia in **IPH...; Assumption; Julius Caesar**; and **Depot**. For Eastern Angles: Charlie in **Bentwater Roads**; and Stephan van Calcar in **The Anatomist**. For the Unicorn Theatre: **Red Fortress**; and **Beauty and the Beast**. Other credits include **Hideaway** (Complicite/Quiconque); **St George and the Dragon** (national tour); Cordelia and the Fool in **King Lear** (international tour); and **Jarman Garden** (Riverside Studios).

Nadia has also participated in a range of projects in development for a variety of theatre companies, including at the National Theatre Studio and the Young Vic, as well as appearing in short films and radio productions.



## **Robert Snell - Assistant Manager / Student / Smart Man / Block / Titorelli / Chorus**

After graduating from Bretton Hall Robert has gained a wide variety of Theatre experience in parts such as Ariel in **The Tempest** at the Crucible Sheffield and Algernon **The Importance of Being Earnest**. He has toured many plays across the country and has worked in Film and Television. Robert is very much looking forward to being part of Blackeyed Theatre's version of 'The Trial' as it's a great opportunity not only to show off his physical ability but also the reality and depth he can bring to characters.



## Paul Taylor - Bailiff / Manager / Judge / Priest / Chorus

Paul has toured extensively around Britain and the rest of Europe, nearly fulfilling his dream of travelling in a troupe, in a caravan, to a town, put up the stage, do the show, pack up and move on. Paul has enjoyed a varied and interesting career with roles including Emcee in ***Cabaret***, Mozart in ***Amadeus***, Tom Jones in ***The History of Tom Jones***, several outings as Oberon/Theseus in ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***, Norman in ***The Dresser***, Peter Quinn/Miles in ***Turn of the Screw***, Macheath in ***The Beggars Opera***, Dorian Gray in ***A Picture of Dorian Gray***, Jesus in ***Godspell***, Orin and others in ***Little Shop of Horrors***, Dick/Schnitzerschitz in ***Ha Ha Hitler*** and Jerome in Tom Neill's adaptation of ***Three Men in a Boat***. Previous roles for Blackeyed Theatre include The Singer in ***The Caucasian Chalk Circle***, Arturo Ui in ***The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui***, Yvan in ***Art***, Paul in ***Misery***, Willy in ***Blue Remembered Hills*** and Mme Ranyevskaya/Firs in ***The Cherry Orchard***. Christmas, always a fun time for actors, has given just as much variety and has seen Paul as Captain Hook in ***Peter Pan***, King Pie Rat in ***Dick Whittington***, as an Ugly Sister in ***Cinderella*** (twice - he looks good in a frock and has great legs), The Devil and everything else in ***The Snow Queen***, Big Bad Wolf in ***Big Bad Wolf***, Ghost of Christmas Past and others in ***A Christmas Carol***, Widow Twanky in ***Aladdin*** and Fleur in ***Beauty and The Beast***.



His film credits include Tim in ***Curtain Call***, Jamie in ***Unbelievably British*** (nominated in several international film festivals, Short Film category) and Tim in ***Chocolates and Champagne*** – a film he enjoyed making immensely. Lately, Paul has been enjoying several interesting projects in Norwich and the rest of Norfolk, most recently as part of ***An Impossible Journey: The Art of Tadeusz Kantor***, a site specific theatre piece for installation on a steam train.

## Simon Wegrzyn - Joseph K

Simon is an actor based in London, and for many years was a member of the National Youth Theatre. He graduated with a 1st class BA (Hons) in Acting from UCLAN and has since gone on to work extensively in theatre, television, and film.

Theatre includes; Mr Darcy in ***Pride & Prejudice*** and Sergeant Troy in ***Far From The Madding Crowd*** (The Times Literature Festival), Pocket Boy in ***Fret*** (National Theatre Studio), Charlie in ***Me, Fatty*** (Southwark Playhouse), Nym in ***Henry V*** (RSC), Raleigh in ***Journey's End*** (Edinburgh Playhouse), Fats in ***Hansel & Grettel*** (PBM/New Wimbledon Theatre), Algernon in ***The Importance of Being Earnest*** (Buxton Festival), Nick in ***Curious*** (Southwark Playhouse), Scott in ***Calling*** (Kings Head), The Thief in ***Hanging Around*** (Kneehigh Theatre/National Theatre), Martin in ***Citizenship*** (NYT/National Theatre).



Television & Film includes; Lewis in ***Wannabes*** (BBC Three), Michael in ***Welcome to Neverland*** (North London Film Council), Punk in ***Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll***, Shaun in ***Baby Girl***, Wigga in ***London's Language*** (in association with the Old Vic Theatre) and appeared at Cannes Film Festival 2011 in ***War of the Sexes***, playing lead role Stiffy.

Radio & Voiceover includes; Captain Stuart Braithwaite in ***The Christmas Truce*** (BBC Radio Devon/Splinter Media), and Narration for new television talent show ***Stage*** (Zodiak Media)

Simon is also a Director most known for ***Alice In Wonderland The Musical*** (Castle Theatre, Wellingborough), and is Co-Artistic Director of Splinter Theatre & Media.



# Creative Team

## Ella Vale - Director

Ella trained first as a dancer then as an actress at the Manchester Metropolitan School of Theatre and has worked extensively throughout the UK at theatres including the West Yorkshire Playhouse, the Tricycle Theatre, the Manchester Library Theatre and the Colchester Mercury Theatre. She has also worked with Georgina Lamb and Liam Steel of Frantic Assembly and as a writer and choreographer for Illuminos, producing and directing films and large scale projection art.

She was assistant director on ***The Madness of George III***, a co-production for Original, Blackeyed and Icarus Theatre companies, on ***Treasure Island*** for the Northern Broadsides and on ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** and ***The Mikado*** for the Stephen Joseph Theatre. Movement direction work includes ***The Snow Queen*** for the Stephen Joseph Theatre, ***A Clockwork Orange*** for the Glasgow Citizen's Theatre and ***Tom's Midnight Garden*** for Theatre by the Lake.

## Victoria Spearing - Designer

Since graduating from Bretton Hall in 2001, Victoria has worked as a freelance theatre designer and maker. Theatre work includes ***The Queen and I***, ***Bugsy Malone***, ***BFG***, ***Whistle Down the Wind***, ***When We Were Married***, ***Charlie and the Chocolate Factory***, ***Norfolk's Rose***, ***The Caretaker***, ***Around the World in 80 Days***, ***Alice in Wonderland***, ***The Wizard of Oz***, ***Blue Remembered Hills***, ***Summer Holiday***, ***House and Garden***, ***The Adventures of Mr Toad***, ***Henry V***, ***Oliver!***, ***Fantastic Mr Fox***, ***Brassed Off!***, ***Noughts and Crosses***, ***The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*** and ***Billy Elliot*** (all for South Hill Park Arts Centre), ***Mort the Musical*** and ***Loserville the Musical*** for Youth Music Theatre UK. Touring work includes ***The Caretaker***, ***Art***, ***Misery***, ***The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui***, ***Oedipus***, ***Oh What a Lovely War***, ***The Cherry Orchard***, ***Alfie***, ***The Caucasian Chalk Circle***, ***The Beekeeper*** (all for Blackeyed Theatre), ***See How They Run***, ***Twelfth Night***, ***Dancing at Lughnasa***, ***Shakespeare's R&J***, ***The Importance of Being Oscar***, ***Mallard and Journey's End*** for Original Theatre, ***The Madness of George III*** for Wilde Enterprises and ***The Go! Go! Go! Show*** for Shows4kids. She has also designed South Hill Park's hugely successful pantomimes, ***Dick Whittington***, ***Sleeping Beauty***, ***Jack and the Beanstalk***, ***Cinderella***, ***Aladdin***, ***Beauty and the Beast*** and ***Peter Pan***. In addition she has designed and made props for use in educational productions in most of the major London museums.

## Charlotte McClelland - Lighting Designer

Charlotte trained at Central School of Speech and Drama on an Arts Council Bursary.

Recent lighting designs include: ***Angels on High*** for Guildford International Music festival (vertical dance on Guildford Cathedral), ***Carmen*** and ***The Marriage of Figaro*** for Longborough Festival Opera, ***Chicos del 21*** and ***The City Weeps*** for Frances M Lynch/electric voice theatre. Previous work for Blackeyed Theatre includes ***Oedipus***, ***The Beekeeper*** and ***Oh What a Lovely War***.

## Hannah Gibbs - Costume Designer

Hannah trained in Costume Design and Construction at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh. West End credits include ***Lend Me A Tenor*** (Gielgud Theatre), ***Sweet Charity*** (Theatre Royal Haymarket).

Other theatre credits include ***The Beekeeper*** (Blackeyed Theatre), ***Stand Tall***, ***Ragtime*** (Landor Theatre), ***Romeo and Juliet***, ***Twelfth Night*** (GB Theatre), ***As You Like It*** (Rose Theatre, Kingston), ***Just So***, ***Stiffed*** (Tabard Theatre) ***Gilbert is Dead*** (Hoxton Hall) ***Demi Monde***, ***Richard III***, ***Fool for Love***, ***Romeo and Juliet***, ***A Taste of Honey***, ***Ajax*** (Love and Madness), ***Duet for One*** (Milton Keynes Theatre), ***The Time of Your Life*** (The Finborough Theatre), ***A Latesummer Night's Dream*** (Mill Pond Media), ***Crazy for You*** (The Church Hill Theatre), ***The Wind in the Willows*** (Theatre Workshop), ***Dick McWhittington*** (The Brunton Theatre), ***Troilus and Cressida*** (The Kings Theatre, Edinburgh). Film credits: ***Libertatia***, ***Daniel and 2 Tess*** (LFT).



# Franz Kafka

Kafka was born in [Prague](#) on 3 July 1883. As a [Czech](#)-born Jew who spoke German, Kafka experienced the effects of a low social status amongst the various other ethnicities and social classes that were residing in Prague at that time. Kafka spent most of his life living with his parents, despite the relationship with his father, which could be described as abusive according to Kafka's diary entries and Kafka's reflections in other short stories. Franz Kafka's father, Hermann was a successful businessman, importing goods for the up-and-coming middle class, and the conflict between Kafka and his father was most likely to have been rooted in his father's disdain for his lack of success and ambition. Kafka also suffered from conditions such as [hypochondria](#) and over-anxiety, and so, from a man who was strong-willed and pragmatic, it seems there was little patience from Hermann.



Max Brod

His father's opinion of him did not seem to improve until he graduated with a law degree in 1906 from German University in Prague, and then Kafka spent a short time working for an Italian insurance company. After this he was employed by the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute. Before even studying at university, Kafka read a large amount of philosophy and science, such as [Nietzsche](#), [Darwin](#) and [Spinoza](#), and this helped him write his first works, yet he destroyed them later on, an occurrence which happened several times during his life. It is estimated that in his lifetime he burnt around 90% of his work. It was during this time that he met [Max Brod](#), the editor of [Prager Tagblatt](#), with whom he became close friends over the years. Just before he died, Kafka had told Brod to destroy his works, such as *The Trial*, which had no ending at the time but instead Brod fabricated an ending and published the play along with other works.

Kafka became interested in Jewish folk tales, with the support of an actor named Isaac Löwy, and possibly the influence of his Jewish mother. He investigated the history, myths and the language, including giving lectures at universities on Yiddish. He wrote *The Judgement* in eight hours in September 1912 and therefore showed an original version of surrealism in literature, but never in his writing did he write a full-length novel. He became accustomed to writing in a feverish and addictive manner, lacking in sleep and forgetting to eat. He would write in German, due to his disdain for the oppression he had received from the local Czechs in Prague for being a Jew. This meant that his stories and diaries were not translated until over ten years after his death.

Franz Kafka went through a series of disconnected romances, and from his diary entries and the reflections of those who knew him, he found it difficult to commit to them and understand what he really desired. One particular involvement was with a secretarial assistant in a Berlin office, Felice Bauer, and the course of the relationship lasted around 5 years, pinpointed with a couple of engagements and separations. Felice eventually married another man in 1919, claiming she could not cope with Kafka's depressive episodes, which were heightened by his diagnosis of [tuberculosis](#) in 1917, and he stopped writing in his diary as a result of his manic nature. He was famously involved with Czech writer, [Milena Jesenská-Pollak](#), from 1920 for two years, despite her being married to critic Ernst Pollak, however it seems the marriage was an open one, with Pollak; he was known for having many affairs himself. Finally, Kafka met [Dora Diamant](#) in 1923, where they developed a close bond, and it may have been because of the success and happiness of this relationship that he chose to destroy the rest of his writings. He also asked Dora to burn them if he was unable to, should his condition worsen, as it did over the years.

In 1924, Kafka was taken to Wiener Wald Sanatorium, dying only a few months later at the age of 41. Despite his efforts to maintain a physical and mental health, his hypochondria, tuberculosis and depression tormented him particularly towards the end. A letter to Brod was found in his desk in Prague, stating his final wish for all his diaries and stories to be destroyed, but less than two months later Brod signed an agreement to produce a posthumous edition of Kafka's writings.



Isaac Löwy



Felice Bauer



Milena Jesenská



Dora Diamant





# Steven Berkoff

Steven Berkoff is one of the most famous playwrights of the 20th and 21st centuries. [The Guardian said recently](#), 'At the grand age of 70, Steven Berkoff remains one of the most provocative voices in British theatre.'

Born into a Jewish Russian family in [Hackney](#) in 1937, Berkoff was part of the large immigrant population of East London. He was originally named Leslie Steven Berks (his original surname, 'Berkovitch', was subsequently shortened by his father). As a young child he was evacuated to [Luton](#) during the [Second World War](#), then returned to the blitzed East End to go to [Harold Pinter](#)'s Old School in Hackney, which he hated.

At the age of 15 he spent a short time in Borstal after stealing a bike. A child who could not settle in the bleak and crumbling world of post-war London, Berkoff used the theatre to escape from his reality. He was educated at Hackney Downs School and trained at the [Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art](#) in 1958, and in 1965, at the [Ecole Jacques Le Coq](#) in Paris. In 1968, after working in repertory theatre, he founded the London Theatre Group, working with a group of actors to perform an adaptation of Franz Kafka's story [In The Penal Colony](#), and his first original play [East](#) established him as a major talent.

Berkoff's hard start in life comes through in his writing, and particularly in the plays he wrote in the 1970s and 1980s, many of which have a bleak, nightmarish quality. As a playwright he is performed all over the world, and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival he is the most performed playwright after Shakespeare.

It also shaped him as an actor. 'Acting was my therapy', Berkoff once [told the Observer](#). 'A person can find themselves through acting - and escape themselves. Acting can release you and make you so much more aware of life'. As a performer, it's on stage that Berkoff comes into his own. Celebrated as an amazingly physical performer, his one man performances in particular have to be seen to be believed! However, many will recognise him for his film roles, which are varied and include aliens, bond villains and Adolf Hitler in films including [Beverly Hills Cop](#), [Octopussy](#), [A Clockwork Orange](#) and [Rambo: First Blood Part II](#).



And even at the age of 74, he's not exactly 'taking it easy'. For despite claiming to be in semi-retirement, in the five years he's appeared in a number of films and TV episodes, acted in his own plays and did a solo tour with [Shakespeare's Villains](#). In 2008, he brought his own stage version of the classic film ***On The Waterfront*** to the West End and in 2011 directed his own version of [Oedipus](#) at Nottingham Playhouse and performed a one man show at Riverside Studios in Hammersmith called [One Man](#).



# Characters & Synopsis

above: Anthony Perkins as Josef K in Orson Welles' 1962 film version

## Characters

Joseph K  
 Miss Burstner  
 Mrs Grubach  
 Two Guards  
 Doorkeeper  
 Inspector  
 Leni  
 Huld  
 K's Father  
 Block  
 Laundress  
 Student  
 Bailiff  
 The Chorus of Nine People Waiting  
 Titorelli  
 Priest  
 A Strange Man

Chief Clerk at the Bank  
 Tenant in the Lodging House  
 Landlady – and Stripper  
 Police and Bank Colleagues  
 Guarding the Great Door of the Law  
 Police  
 Huld's Mistress  
 Lawyer to K  
 Disembodied voice of the past  
 Pathetic Client of Huld's  
 Works in the Courts  
 Court Madman and Lover of Laundress  
 Works in Courts and is humiliated

Court Painter – and surrealist verbalist clown  
 K's Confessor and Judge  
 Singer

Plus the clients of Huld – the clerks of the Bank – the populace of the city

## Synopsis

Joseph K is in a waiting room. Unidentified voices arrest him and charge him with an undisclosed crime.

At eight o'clock the next morning, two men enter K's apartment saying they are sent to guard him. They search his rooms, confiscate his clothes and physically abuse him, without an explanation.

An Inspector arrives. K demands an explanation, but none is provided. K demands a lawyer, but changes his mind. K offers the Inspector a bargain, but it is refused. K leaves for work.

K arrives at the bank and is wished a happy 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. A nameless telephone caller informs K that he will be interrogated on Sunday. K finishes work, decides against visiting his usual stripper and goes home.

He has a conversation with his landlady, Mrs Grubach, about his arrest and the respectability both of the household and of another lodger named Miss Bürstner.

At eleven o'clock that night, K knocks at Miss Bürstner's room and apologises that the guards searched it. He wakes the household explaining the details of the arrest, but she doesn't understand. He tries to kiss her, but fails awkwardly.

Two guards appear and accuse K of denouncing them. They are whipped for stealing K's linen. Joseph K offers himself in their place.

Eight o'clock the next morning. It is Sunday. K is invited by the Assistant Manager of the Bank to a party, but he declines and makes his way to the Court of Enquiries for his interrogation.

He is greeted by a Laundress, wife of the Court Bailiff, who flirts with him. A student arrives and makes love to the Laundress. K tries to stop them, but fails. The Court Bailiff arrives seeking his wife. The Bailiff resents the Laundress cheating on him and persuades K to sort out the Student. They both go upstairs to the Court.

Several other people are waiting at the Offices of the Court for various reasons. K tries to escape, but he can't. He is thrown through time and in to a waiting room, where he meets a Girl and a Smart Man, who offer to show him the way out. K renews his efforts to escape. His dead father appears to him and advises him to visit the lawyer Huld.

Joseph K visits Huld and takes him on as his lawyer. He is seduced by Huld's mistress, Leni. Huld shits himself and has a heart attack.

K's interrogators accuse him of damaging his case by cavorting with Huld's mistress.

Alone in his office, K mulls over his case and his work situation at the Bank. He considers dropping Huld.

Huld tells K that progress has been made on his case, but will not tell him the nature of that progress.

Joseph K decides to drop Huld as his lawyer.

Block, who claims to be Huld's only real client, leaps from the darkness on to K's back. He tells K that Huld is a poor lawyer and that he has five other lawyers. K sleeps with Leni again and tells Block that he is going to dismiss Huld. Huld humiliates Block as an example to K. The Manager of the Bank tells K to go and see Titorelli, the court painter, who has connections with the judges.

K visits Titorelli, who offers K a provisional acquittal. K dismisses his offer as useless. Titorelli paints him in to a position of anguish and guilt.

K's trial begins. Unnamed voices charge him in archaic quasi-religious language.

Joseph K is back in the Bank, but he does not know where he is. The Assistant Manager sends him on an appointment to the Cathedral. On the way he meets Leni, who tells K that the appointment does not exist.

K enters the Cathedral. A Choir introduce the surroundings and describe K actions. A Priest in a pulpit tells K that he is guilty and describes to him the nature of the law as it relates to his life. Joseph K pleads for help.





## Director's Note

So, thoughts on *The Trial*. When I first read this play I honestly thought - my goodness, what on earth is this all about? Then I read it again, and I understood a bit more, then I read it again and understood a bit more still! The hardest thing about it, and also the most interesting thing, is that we as an audience must make up our own minds about what *The Trial* really *means*. [Albert Camus](#) says of Kafka's book, *The Trial*, '*It is the fate and perhaps the greatness of this work that it offers everything and confirms nothing.*' I think what he's trying to say is that we will each of us have our own ideas when we watch or read this play, that it will speak to us according to the life we have experienced and the things we individually relate to as human beings.

So one of my greatest challenges as a director is to allow this play when it is being performed to still '*confirm nothing.*' I want to make it approachable, I want to bring my audience close to Joseph K and the world he inhabits, I want them to go on the journey with him and feel that they too could have been Joseph K, could have acted in the same way, could have felt both innocent and guilty of a crime which is never named. But I must try to avoid forcing my audience to feel that *The Trial* is only about what *I* think it is about. The glorious thing about Berkoff's piece is that there are no wrong answers!

I am so looking forward to getting my cast in a room and discovering this play. It isn't going to be a production with a grand gimmick or design concept - it is going to be the production I and five fantastic actors create through the pooling of all our minds and ideas. I am expecting it to be very very hard work; I am expecting it to be a bit of a brain-melter, and I am expecting it to be funny, anarchic and silly! Like the best things in life, it will be an enormous challenge - but it may also be a great adventure.

**Ella Vale**



# Physical Theatre

Physical theatre is a general term used to describe any mode of performance that pursues storytelling through primarily physical means.

There are many different styles of performance which could all, quite legitimately, describe themselves using the term 'physical theatre', which has led to a lot of confusion as to what the definition of physical theatre actually is! These include Mime, Contemporary Dance, Clowning, Physical Comedy, Theatrical Acrobatics and sometimes Puppetry.

While performances based around all of the above could equally claim to be 'physical theatre', it is often difficult to say for certain what is and what is not physical theatre. Distinctions are often made quite arbitrarily by critics and performing companies.

Physical Theatre's primary focus is on the physical work of the actors, expressed through the use of their bodies. This is not to say that text isn't extremely important but it must be immersed in or work seamlessly with physical representation or interpretation. Companies like [Complicite](#) produce work in which language is woven into a physical journey that the audience witnesses. It is a highly visual form of theatre. The action in physical theatre may have a psychological base, an emotional thread or a clear storyline and it can often grow out of improvisational work. However, the means of expression are always primarily physical rather than textual – the sub-text appears visually rather than vocally, and you can often see what isn't said.

Mime and theatrical clowning schools such as L'Ecole Jacques Lecoq in Paris have had a big influence on many modern expressions of physical theatre - Berkoff received his initial training there. Eastern European practitioners have also had a strong influence on modern physical theatre, and both [Vsevolod Meyerhold](#) and [Jerzy Grotowski](#) are regarded by many as 'fathers' of modern physical theatre. Berkoff's own influences can be recognised in the work of Lecoq, Grotowski and [Antonin Artaud](#).

Contemporary dance has had a huge influence on what we call physical theatre, partly because most physical

theatre requires actors to have a level of physical control and flexibility rarely found in those who do not have some sort of movement background. Modern physical theatre also has strong roots in more ancient traditions such as Commedia dell'arte and some suggest links to the ancient Greek theatre!

Other British companies practising physical theatre include DV8, Kneehigh Theatre and Complicite.

[Daniel Stein](#), a teacher out of the lineage of Etienne Decroux, has this to say about physical theatre:

*'I think physical theatre is much more visceral and audiences are affected much more viscerally than intellectually. The foundation of theater is a live, human experience, which is different from any other form of art that I know of. Painting, writing, music happen in a mostly interpretive way, which is to say that somebody sits down and writes something and then somebody else interprets it, often in front of a camera. Live theatre, where real human beings are standing in front of real human beings, is about the fact that we have all set aside this hour; the sharing goes in both directions. The fact that it is a very physical, visceral form makes it a very different experience from almost anything else that we partake of in our lives. I don't think we could do it the same way if we were doing literary-based theater.'*





## Original Production

above: Ohad Shachar as Joseph K in National Theater of Israel production. Photo by Rachel Hirsch

Berkoff had given several interviews on his development of *The Trial*, which gave insight to his concept of the story. He believed that the story was not based solely on one theme; that it appealed to audience members in many different ways. Some would think it was about [totalitarianism](#), some about bureaucracy, perhaps [nihilism](#), madness or [paranoia](#). Whatever the theme would be, Berkoff claimed that the story essentially reaches out on the investigation of human nature, a universal subject, and Kafka managed an approach that was simple and direct, yet profound. He had put a magnifying glass on society and presented it in the form of Joseph K. Berkoff believed that Kafka's fear of life, the uncertainty of the immortal soul and his complexes with society around him were reflected strongly in this piece.

Berkoff first began to work on *The Trial* with a group of students when he took a teaching post at Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art. He had been teaching mime and movement alongside drama, and when he was asked to put on a more experimental production with the students, he chose a novel, simply because most plays did not have 20 characters, and *The Trial* was the story he chose. He read out the first line and encouraged the students to act it out, and from that he continued to write a form of play incorporating the use of an ensemble.

Because of the nature of the story, an ensemble became a thoroughly fitting tool for the presentation of the play, Berkoff's version of which was first performed in 1970 and published in 1981. It gave the nightmarish style of the play a particular detachment that meant the characters that the actors portrayed did not have the rigid restriction of staying as that character; they were able to slip back into the ensemble without breaking the moment where they once adopted a character's personality. Berkoff also played Titorelli and chose to base the character on Salvador Dali, to compliment the surrealism of the play.

At that point in his career Berkoff was fascinated with the work of [Alwin Nikolais](#), an American choreographer, who in one dance piece had used coloured screens to create different scenes and environments. With a hope to involve this method of making images with props, they constructed screens as well, with the idea that they

could reveal and close the scenes. The screens had reached the point of construction where they were simple frames, and Berkoff realized that the frames presented much more opportunity for *The Trial*. The frames could create corridors, and place the ensemble inside them, and therefore forming another dimension to the space on the stage and give a new edge to the story. These props could express the play by developing the story physically (changing from one location to another) but could also act as a metaphor for the parable of the doorkeeper before the door.

### **Foreword – by Steven Berkoff**

The trial is my life. It is anyone's life. It is the trial of actually creating the production, *The Trial*. The four months of preparation. I read the book several times before I tried to hew out of its guts its theatrical essence. A metaphysical theatre. I studied it for years and became Joseph K. I was K, struggling in the abyss of self-doubt and yet wanting, like K, to be that man who 'cannot live without a lasting trust in something indestructible within himself.'

It was during a time of deadening theatre work for a hack director that the full force of my energy came throttling out when, after rehearsals, I would escape to the refuge of my room and investigate and unweave the tapestry that was to be my play/production. It is a diary of a no-one, the diary of the oppressed. I worked on it as a work of obsession feeds inspiration and is its lover. Anything less is a career but for me it was a signpost leading to all the locked-away magician's tricks that I had stored up in my sleeve. Kafka expressed me as I expressed Kafka. His words stung and hung on my brain, infused themselves in my art and were regurgitated in my work. The labyrinth. The endless puzzle of the myth of [Sisyphus](#), the quest of [Theseus](#) through the maze. Was I Theseus? Joseph K's mediocrity was mine and his ordinariness and fears were mine too: the 'underhero' struggling to find the ego that would lead him to salvation.

There is a lake of ecstasy that bubbles beneath every shy, ordinary being. What is K's alias Kafka's guilt? Nothing so complex as world guilt or messianic martyrdom, but K's guilt for which he must die is the guilt of betrayal: the guilt of betraying his inner spirit to the safety of mediocrity. For every action that is not expressed through fear, for every desire that wells up in the breast and is not given vent in action through fear turns into a little rat of guilt that gnaws away at your vitals. For every shout held back, for every venture not ventured on, for every regret in the soul, for every compromise you make and slur you took adds to the sorry storehouse of guilt that screams out for justice. The soul screams out for vengeance, starved as it is in its dark and sticking hovel. Guilt is the difference between what your spirit sings out for and what your courage permits you to take. Joseph K's guilt – Kafka's guilt.

'Before the door stands the doorkeeper' is the opening line of the parable related to K by the priest from whom he seeks salvation; and a man is waiting there to gain admission to the Law. The doorkeeper cannot admit him just yet and thus begins the ludicrous parable investigating every contingency and nuance of the Law. An [exegesis](#) of [vacillation](#). The man waits for years and years but did not thrust himself through because he believed the doorkeeper when he said that there were other doors and each man guarding them was successively stronger than he. Burst through the doors. But the Law demands due process and one must wait. But in the end he dies of waiting, when the door to the Law was meant only for him. You cannot wait for what is due to you. You must seize it.

We devised a door. A wooden rectangular frame that stood by itself. Ten frames became the set. The set became the environment. A set should be able to melt in an instant and never represent a real heavy piece of pseudo-reality. The theatre of the ultrabourgeois, so bereft of anything but the obvious, with its expensive lumbering pieces of dead weight. The fortunes spent on trying to be real, to satisfy the bloated after supper punters. So much waste. Our set of ten screens became the story and as the story could move from moment to moment so could our set – no long waits for a scene change but as a flash with the magician's sleight of hand. We could be even quicker than the story. A room could become a trap, a prison, expand and contract and even spin around the protagonist. This enabled us to recreate the environment – both physical and mental – of the book...

To create a metaphysical concept is to condense reality into its surreal intense image: reality heightened by fear, excitement or the pathological hyper-awareness of the artist. The chorus was as a Greek chorus, becoming the conscience of K. The care of their playing, the depersonalized attitude of the people, was necessary for K to view them as a 'faceless group moving together.'

So our actors were a Greek chorus turning a body into a chair or a chest of drawers, since we are what we use. When you search a person's room or a cupboard you are violating him since he momentarily becomes the object. The person and his objects are wed, so by taking over the role not only of human but also the environment, the actor is able to be an outraged chest of drawers! So art rules over reality.

The Trial played successfully in Germany to over 1000 people a night while in London I had to struggle for audiences at the Round House. So The Trial was seen in England for only three weeks, in 1973.



# Post Show Notes

**Acting** (characters, relationships, vocal delivery, physical traits, use of space, etc.)

**Set and props** (time period, location, moods, etc.)

**Costume** (time period, status, masks, materials, etc.)

**What is the play about?**

**The bit that worked the best for you, and why**

**A bit that didn't work for you, and why**

**How would you have done that bit differently?**