

CASPAR. Actor, co-founder of Escapade Theatre

'English and Catalan humour are quite similar'

Caspar from the Barcelona-based Escapade Theatre talks about the upcoming English comedy **Dinner for One** at Teatre Tantarantana in Barcelona

MARCELA TOPOR

You've been performing **Dinner for One** for 10 years now, with great critical and audience acclaim. What is the play based on?

—On a famous 12-minute musical sketch performed by two English actors many years ago. They took the piece to Germany in the 1960s and there the state television recorded it and it became a classic. In Germany, Austria and Finland it's become a tradition to show it on TV every Christmas Day, which is strange because it's unknown in England. My stage partner Sue went on holiday in Germany and she saw it on TV and thought it would be a fantastic piece for Escapade to do, which we did. We turned 12 minutes into an hour and 20 minutes, with all the new material created by us.

What is it about?

—It is a strange ritual: a little old aristocratic English lady, Miss Sophie, has imaginary guests to her birthday and James the Butler, my character, is the one who is in charge of recreating these characters, but unfortunately there is a lot of toasting with alcohol in each toast,



which makes him quite drunk and therefore difficult to recreate the characters.

Quite a challenge, then.

—I play five characters in total; it's a very energetic piece and it's interesting because it's not just

playing different characters, it's playing the butler, who is playing those characters.

It has been described as an overdose of laughter...

—Yes, but in some ways the piece is also about loneliness be-

cause this little old lady doesn't have any friends any more, so it's really the relationship between two elderly people. The main character is English, the humour is English, and that works well here: there's a lot of similarity between Catalan and English humour, we share things in common, such as irony and the ability to laugh at oneself. It's not a coincidence that most of the good comedy series have all been shown on TV3: Yes minister, Fawlty Towers, The IT crowd, Monty Python...

Is it all in English?

—Actually most of it is in Spanish and Catalan. The imaginary characters that the butler creates are from a different European country: there's an Italian, a Spaniard, a Frenchman and also a German. When the butler recreates all these characters, he does not really speak their languages so it's like a strange mixture of gibberish and some real language. But the piece is quite physical so you understand perfectly what he's talking about.

Is it a typical Escapade piece?

—We've always created plays that are very physical; language



Caspar and Sue Flack performing in this hilarious English comedy as James the Butler and Miss Sophie. /WESTUDIO



is important but we've always concentrated on the physical side: that's our taste and in terms of training I went to a normal drama school but I also did mime and circus, and I also worked with Peter Brook's company. So, we do physical theatre and English comedy. Quite an antidote to the dark days we are living in. Although you might have moments of sadness for the

characters, it's really just entertainment designed to make the audience laugh.

What would you highlight about the play?

—It's very funny, but develops slowly, making it powerful at the end when it becomes chaotic and things get out of control.

Is your audience mostly English-speaking?

—Not necessarily. As a com-

pany we perform in English, Catalan and Spanish. From our run at Tantarantana, we've come to expect a general audience. I've lived here for 22 years, so I speak good Catalan and most of my friends are natives, I've worked with the Catalan companies La Cubana, Els Comediants and feel this is home.

Is it hard to live from theatre in Catalonia?

—I think you have to be very flexible and have the imagination to survive as a performer, because I do different kinds of work; I also have a small company performing shows for schools to teach English to children, I do voice-overs for ads, I've done a bit of film, I perform at events for congresses and businesses and I also write scripts for feature films.

Caspar, actor

MARCELA TOPOR

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Escapade Theatre returns to Barcelona with the celebrated English comedy *Dinner for One*. Caspar, the protagonist, showed us around at Teatre Tantarantana.

1. Wooden Mushroom. This possession belonged to my dearly departed mother. I remember her darning socks with it – she would place the wooden mushroom inside the sock and then sew up any holes. Apart from its association with my mother, I like the feel of this unusual object.

2. Jesters Cap. This is from my early 20s when I was the city of York's official jester. Together we had many adventures: from fooling around on the streets of war-torn El Salvador to being arrested in London and then asked to perform for all the officers of Bow Street Police Station (who later passed the hat so that I left with the gratitude of my arresting officers and a whole bundle of money!).

3. Stan the Elephant. When my step-daughter Emma was four, she didn't like this little elephant because he's frowning, so I set about making him more interesting. I explained that his name was Stan Dard-Elephant (that's what's written on the label) and began making him speak and annoying Emma with his trunk. She fell in love with him and so Stan became a legend in our household.

4. Metal Goblet. This beaten-up metal cup is a prop from "Dinner For One" and has survived many performances. James the Butler fills it with all kinds of alcoholic drinks as he toasts Ms. Sofie and becomes inebriated. It holds many memories of all the fun we've had with this crazy show.

5. Bagpiper. This little statue of a bagpiper was given to me by the choreographer of *La Cubana* on the opening night of our show *Nuts Coconuts* at the Edinburgh Festival. The first time the festival had ever produced a show 100%. Crazy days, I worked with *La Cubana* for almost a year on two others projects but the high point was opening the Edinburgh Festival, especially as most of my family is from Edinburgh.

6. The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas. This decrepit copy of the collected poems of Dylan Thomas is one of my most prized possessions. The cover fell off many years ago but I continue to regularly consult and enjoy the work of this genius. I think I bought it second hand when I was about 18 years old. I'd already become familiar with his work from the age of 14 when I went to see a theatrical version of his brilliant radio play, *Under Milk Wood*. Unique and inspiring, his use of the English language has never been matched.

7. Wooden Shoe. This curious item is actually a bottle opener. It was given to me by the workers in a shoe factory in Germany. I'd just performed in the factory and they gave me the shoe as a gift.

8. Main Stage Pass. This is my stage pass from last year's Sziget Festival, a huge music festival held on an island in the Danube in Budapest. It was my second year performing at this fantastic festival. I have the stage pass because I was part of the opening act for the likes of Blur, Stone Roses, Nick Cage and Skunk Anasie. A wonderful experience although it nearly ended badly last summer when I almost crashed into the singer of Blur during his concert!



Photo: JUANIMA RAMOS

