

Bring Me The Head Of Ubu Roi

David Thomas as Père Ubu.
Sarah Jane Morris as Mère Ubu.



Expressionist avant-garde band Pere Ubu and film-makers The Brothers Quay present *Bring Me The Head Of Ubu Roi*, an adaptation of *Ubu Roi*, Alfred Jarry's landmark play that inspired the band's name and is widely seen as the precursor to the Absurdist, Dada and Surrealist art movements.

Written by Pere Ubu's singer, David Thomas, it is as groundbreaking and radical in its intent as the original that sparked riots in a Paris theater in 1896 - a repudiation of common sense and the refined aesthetic at the heart of the Art-Industrial Complex, of which President Eisenhower warned so eloquently... or was that the Military-Industrial Complex? No matter, same thing.

Bring Me The Head Of Ubu Roi premiered at Queen Elizabeth Hall in London's Southbank Centre for a two night run on April 24 and 25 2008.

This adaptation approaches theater with the unsettling ethos that Mr Thomas and his comrades have applied to music production since 1975. It incorporates the narrative voices of abstract and concrete sound into musical structure, creates an aural Theater of the Imagination, and facilitates the Intrusive Other - a mechanism by which the telling of a story incorporates Points Of View that run in parallel or at some angle to the central narrative, crossing it, intruding, overlaying, contradicting, deprecating, or even ignoring it.

Bring Me The Head Of Ubu Roi does not promote mayhem. It preserves mayhem. The theatrical production is framed by wide-screen animation from The Brothers Quay which serves as an innovative interpretation of Jarry's staging instructions. David Thomas takes on the role of

Père Ubu. Ex-Communards singer Sarah Jane Morris is Mère Ubu. Band members enact minor cast roles when not performing the 14 songs, or laying down the electronica ambience, that provide the live score to this 100 minute, two act show.

Puppet-like choreographies, chaotic interventions, and gee-mom-look-we're-acting-now passages flesh out the performance. Other music groups have ventured into theater but never to the extent that the band itself, as a self-contained unit, undertakes all aspects of the production. Pere Ubu goes to places few others would even dare to dream of. Fearless or stupid, what's the difference? *We call it disasto so nothing can go wrong.*

Jarry's plays were widely and wildly hated for their vulgarity, brutality, low comedy and complete lack of literary finish. They were seen as the theatrical equivalent of an anarchist attack.

"One reason that *Ubu Roi* endures is that, like water is the Universal Solvent, Père Ubu is the Universal Monster," Mr Thomas says. "Whoever you personally think is the Bad Guy - whether you demonize those on the Left or the Right, or everyone In-Between - the Church or the State, Big Business or Big Labor - Père Ubu can supply the face and voice. Ubu is a portrait of the soul of every do-gooder monster."

MusicWeb International

Savage wit. So involving was this piece of music theatre that when someone in the audience was taken ill during the performance, everyone thought it was part of the act, "planted" in the stalls to extend the show, even when a paramedic arrived.

Ian Gittins, *The Guardian*

The vivacious Morris is excellent as the plotting queen.

Ed Pinsent, *The Sound Projector*

All very anti-theatre and anti-good taste. And what made it all worthwhile? Hearing Thomas in full baritone majesty belching out that one word he was born to deliver: "MERDRE!!!"

Nick Morgan, *Whiskyfun*

Like pantomime without the ghastly television "celebrities," a sort of Carry On Pataphysics. I've rarely left a theatre feeling quite as entertained.

The Londonist

It's hard not to delight in Thomas' frustrated dictatorship of both Poland and the production itself. Deviating from the plot to demand that the scene fade to black (which it always did, of course, by way of someone running past with a sign reading "Fade To Black"), Thomas displays an enthusiasm for the work that quickly spreads to the audience. When two of the characters exclaimed, "I think we're in danger of alienating the audience!", Queen Elizabeth Hall erupted in laughter. It was hilarious because it couldn't have been further from the truth.

David Thomas as Père Ubu
April 25 2008, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London



About David Thomas

Founder of legendary avant-rock band Pere Ubu, singer David Thomas has been re-writing the rules of popular music for more than 34 years. Both UCLA and London's Southbank Centre have presented multi-day festivals of his work. In 2002 he featured in a three-month run of the rogue opera *Shockheaded Peter* in London's West End. He has featured in numerous concert productions of the music of Brecht, John Cage, Disney, Firesign Theater, Harry Smith, Nino Rota and Hal Wilner's Rogue's Gallery. His first theatrical production, *Mirror Man*, toured the UK in 2001 and was produced at UCLA in 2003.

<http://www.ubuprojex.net/bio.html#dt>

About Pere Ubu

Pere Ubu defined the art of cult; refined the voice of the outsider; and influenced the likes of Joy Division, Pixies, Husker Du, Henry Rollins, REM, Sisters of Mercy, Bauhaus, Julian Cope and countless others.

<http://www.ubuprojex.net/pereubu.html>

About The Brothers Quay

The Quay Brothers were born near Philadelphia where they studied at the Philadelphia College of Art, then later in London at the Royal College of Art. Since 1980 they have produced a hybrid variety of puppet animation film work: documentaries on Stravinsky, Janáček, Anamorphosis; interludes for MTV; commercials, as well as films inspired by the writings of Kafka, Bruno Schulz (*Street Of Crocodiles*) and Robert Walser (*Institute Benjamenta*). Their work also includes decors and stage designs for the English National Opera, Royal National Theatre, the Royal Danish Ballet, and others.

About Sarah Jane Morris

She has recorded 10 solo albums, won a European Grammy, a San Remo Song Festival award, an Edinburgh First for *Hollywood Babylon*, and The Evening Standard nominated her best supporting actress for "Lucy" in *Beggar's Opera*. She played lead in *Thin Air*, a 5-part TV series for the BBC directed by Antonia Bird.

Photos by Angell
and Mark Mawston.



An Irony-Free™ Production

For information contact:
directors@ubuprojex.net



View of Stage Cyc

This is the Brothers Quay mockup for the Queen Elizabeth Hall production.

The Band Area is far Stage Left, arranged in a row, side-on to audience so as to avoid blocking the cyc.

Actual projection, unlike picture, does not extend to the floor. Dimensions are 4:3.

Mic positions are marked with an "x."

Click [here](#) to see the Quay Brothers' animation for the song "March Of Greed" from "Bring Me The Head Of Ubu Roi." The featured singer is Sarah Jane Morris. The Quays' animation, projected wide-screen serves to frame the action on stage, which includes performance of the song, and Puppet Watusi choreography devised by Ubu bass player Michele Temple.