

Director's Statement
The Government Inspector
Fall-Ex 2022

The roles we occupy—our career, our status, our familial role, our education—feel invariably real and eternal when we occupy them, but when this illusion of stability shatters, we are left naked, a stranger in the self. Loss exposes us. When a mother loses her child, she not only grieves her beloved gone, but also the role of motherhood which defined her. A king is usurped. What is he now without that power to command, to be a mighty voice heeded by all? Someone's lover is lost. What are they now without the life that once was merged with their own? Suddenly, in the swiftness of a curtain's fall, we see how little we know about ourselves beyond our roles and relationships. The cloak of order is striped from our backs, and we find ourselves standing in relief to the bare absurdity of the world. The only choice is to laugh or cry.

***The Government Inspector* is a comedy about awakening to our own unknowing.** The characters in this play find their world infinitely serious. The audience, at a remove, can see the vanity and stupidity of these characters as they jockey for position and look toward Khlestakov for deliverance. We chuckle at their small meaningless lives. When the real government inspector arrives at the end of the play, the mayor and his cronies experience with terrifying clarity their world as the audience sees it: a farce. It is a horrible sight.

The ridiculousness of this show will emerge spontaneously because all the characters believe their world (in all its bustling and fussing!) with utter sincerity. The greatest failing we could do to this show is to turn these characters into lifeless stereotypes. Instead, each actor must approach their roles with compassion, seeking, as any good actor does, the current of dignity that runs through the life they occupy. No ironic distance! No laughing at yourself! Remember, these characters are like us: they desire power, need love, feel greed, reach for more always, and are fooled.

Theater is voluntary depict. In a good production, the audience is submerged into a realm of pretend and loses themselves in it. When the lights come up after a great show, the emergence from the world of play can be as shocking as a cold glass of water, like a head bursting through the surface of a brisk lake and being greeted by the bright white sun. Returning to the world outside can be both invigorating and unnerving; we may see the world with new eyes, and this world can be fresh, beautiful, horrid, or all topsy-turvy.

Our production must mirror the audience's experience of awakening from the world of pretend with the character's experience of awakening from their sincere belief in Khlestakov's deliverance. Throughout *The Government Inspector*, the audience laughs at the vanity of the character's affairs from a comfortable distance, assured of their independence from the deceit at hand—but this distance is an illusion. As the play ends, like a horrible reckoning, the separation between performers and audience comes crashing down. The world of the theater we built up and believed in is revealed to be a flimsy façade. The audience confronts that when they are laughing at the fools on stage, they are also laughing at themselves.

In terms of design, we must highlight, instead of conceal, the machinery of the theater. This play is meaningless if reduced to realism, in either staging or design. To capture the dream-like vertigo of the play, everything must be expressly theatrical. All that takes place in the two hours of production should be under the unfaltering gaze of the audience. There is no backstage. Costumes changes are visible. The ropes that pull up the setting signs must be seen and pulled by hands that are seen. Yes, even the stage manager is on stage. In terms of aesthetics, design should be inspired by the circus, puppet theater, freak shows at the county fair, and other playful yet ultimately drab attempts at concealment and revelation.

- Leo Egger
July 30, 2022