



Glass Chair Chair Glass

By Annie Caulfield



Absolutely Productions produces another innovative, star studded play for Radio 3 Drama. Following their hugely successful and critically acclaimed Flann O'Brien Drama 'Your Only Man' Absolutely productions have teamed up with writer Annie Caulfield again to produce 'Glass Chair Chair Glass' which will have its UK premier on Sunday 18th September on BBC Radio 3 at 8:30pm.

Russ Abbott, Harriett Walter, Alan Corduner, Emily Bruni and Hugh Ross star in *Glass Chair Chair Glass*, a 90 minute play that imagines a day when Tommy Cooper met playwright Eugene Ionesco. It could have happened. Their worlds collide making us cry, wonder and fall down laughing.



It's a sunny morning in Paris, 1975, and in the throes of a paranoia laced drunken spree, Tommy Cooper may not be in the best place to enter Eugene Ionesco's world, where events have the logic of a dream, where people don't tell the truth or even know what it is and where

mysterious and brutal threats are always close. Survivor of Nazis and Stalinists, in permanent exile from his native Romania, Ionesco was always drawn to anarchic comedy as the only way to express the world. His plays generate emotion rather than obvious meaning because he felt life was too unstable to mean very much. Ionesco and Tommy Cooper's world views collide with surprising results, concluding that laughter is often the only real revolution we have left.

A play that waltzes us through thoughts about the state of the world, how to make a salt pot disappear and travel on imaginary motorbikes roar into life, as Cooper and Ionesco ask the question; Is comedy just, business, escapism or is it for the soul?

Annie Caulfield

Writer of *Glass Chair Chair Glass*

Gordon Kennedy told me that someone had told him that Tommy Cooper once met Eugene Ionesco. I didn't need to hear any more. My favourite comedian and my favourite playwright could have been in the same room. Research showed dates and interests colliding; it could have happened. The collision was a



great chance to write a play about comedy. There hasn't been one since *The Comedians*, written in the seventies. I had lots of questions. Mainly, where are the women in all of this? Is it true that if you didn't laugh you'd cry? Is comedy any real use to us in the bad world out there? What's the best kind of joke? Anyway, I had all kinds of fancy ideas about what I was trying to do with this play. But the main thing is the director and the cast made all kinds of things happen that are funny, sad, fascinating - and actually even FUNNIER than I'd imagined they could be.

Gordon Kennedy, Producer

Anecdote to Play



It was the late 1990's, I had just started acting in a reasonably unsuccessful run of Ionesco's 'The Hairless Diva'. This was very frustrating for me as I loved the play, and Ionesco, and I wanted it to be brilliant. It wasn't. We were drowning our sorrows in the theatre bar, post show, one night and I

remember the director talking to someone about Ionesco being a huge fan of Tommy Cooper. The rest of the run and the anecdote are lost to me in a blurry

mess. In fact the Cooper-Ionesco thing is all my brain will allow me to remember of that whole affair. But as you have read that is all Annie needed... thankfully... And thank you Annie, at last something memorable has come out of that bloody production.

Abbot on Cooper

Russ Abbot talks about the experience of playing Tommy Cooper in *Glass Chair Chair Glass*.

Did you know and work with Tommy?

I knew Tommy but never worked with him. I knew him for so long that I can't really remember the first time I met him. I know we were in Manchester together - I was in the Black Abbot's playing the Golden Garter and he was in a club called Fagins so



we hooked up now and again. We did spend time together when I was playing the Princess Theatre Torquay and he was at the Festival in Paignton and we used to meet for a regular Sunday pint. He liked a tippie! I've even got him in my private video footage filmed at that time.

I do remember the last time I saw him. He gave me a manuscript to read, he'd written down an idea for a book. I was very flattered that he wanted me to read it and give him my opinion. It was all typed on A4 paper. Just 22 pages. Sadly I never got the opportunity to give it back to him or share my thoughts on it with him. It was a great honour - and no-one else has ever seen it.

Did he influence you and have an effect on your career?

Of course - because of him Cooperman was born! When the Superman movies came out we decided to create this character and we didn't know whether to do a superman with bulging fake muscles or a bungling hapless hero. And of course we went with the bungling hapless hero.

I was on at the London Palladium the week before he died doing Cooperman and Gwen, his wife, told me he laid on the chaise longue watching it on TV and calling me all the names under the sun! After the funeral we all queued to pay our respects to her and she stopped me and whispered in my ear that he thought I was the cat's whiskers. Coming from him - well I'd never been paid that kind of compliment before.

How did you approach the role in *Glass Chair Chair Glass*?



Very carefully. There are parts in the play which don't do him many favours - another side to him. I was apprehensive at first but my mind was eased by the fact that consent had been given by his family. I also felt that actually the play wouldn't do him justice if it was just a superficial two-dimensional portrayal of the man

that everyone knew. He was worth more than that. He was so very talented, but with that talent came a complexity and depth that didn't always chime with his public persona. It was a gift of a part for any actor but I'm glad I was able to do it. I hope I captured the essence of him - but with sympathy. He really was a towering talent and I have the greatest respect for him.

Key Cast and Crew

Russ Abbot (Tommy Cooper)

Russ Abbot is today acknowledged as one of the most popular entertainers in Britain, with success across both TV and theatre.

He was recently seen playing the role of 'Hobbo' in the new series of BBC 1's 'Last of the Summer Wine', alongside Brian Murphy (Alvin) and Burt Kwouk (Entwistle)



His theatre credits include the role of 'Fagin' in Cameron Macintosh's production of *Oliver* at the London Palladium, The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, on tour and at the Princess of Wales Theatre in Toronto. Russ' other West End theatre credits include 'Grandpa Potts' in the hit musical *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* immediately following a hit season as Alfred P. Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*. Other hugely successful West End runs include Neil Simon's *Little Me*; Willy Russell's *One for the Road* and. He starred in the title role of *Dr Dolittle* on tour; *Russ Abbot's Palladium Madhouse* at the London Palladium and the European premiere of *Goosebumps Live On Stage* at the Opera House, Blackpool. He appeared to great acclaim in the West End run of Ray Cooney's *Caught In The Net* with Eric Sykes and completed a national tour of the production.

He has had massive TV success with his own hugely popular series - *Russ Abbot's Madhouse* (LWT, six series); *The Russ Abbot Show* (BBC, six series); *The Russ Abbot Show* (Granada TV, two series) as well as three series of *September Song* for Granada TV in which he starred with Michael Williams, *Married For Life* for Carlton TV and countless specials and other appearances. He was the voice of the narrator in the high rating children's TV show *Dream Street* for ITV and he also regularly guested on BBC1 TV's popular series *TV To Go*

Harriet Walter (Gwen Cooper and The Concierge)



Dame Harriet Walter has worked extensively in theatre, film and television. Most recently seen as Livia in 'Women Beware Women' at the National Theatre. She played Elizabeth 1st in 'Mary Stuart' at the Donmar, in the West End and on Broadway, winning the Evening Standard Best Actress Award and a Tony nomination. She is an associate artist of the RSC and has played many roles with them including Cleopatra opposite Patrick Stewart and Lady Macbeth opposite Antony Sher. On film she played Fanny Dashwood in Emma Thompson's version of 'Sense and Sensibility', Emily in "Atonement" and

Queen Adelaide in 'The Young Victoria'. She is also the author of the book "Other People's Shoes" an insider's view the business of being an actor.

Allan Corduner (Eugene Ionesco)

Allan has worked extensively in theatre in the West End and on Broadway as well as numerous roles in film and television. He is probably best known for his portrayal of Sir Arthur Sullivan in Mike Leigh's *Topsy-Turvy* and most recently starred in the dark comedy *Burke and Hare* with Andy Serkis and Simon Pegg. He has recently filmed the feature *Waves From Home* and is about to start filming the feature *Closer To The Moon* with Uma Thurman.



Emily Bruni (The Actress)



In the cinema Emily most recently appeared in Stephen Frear's 'Tamara Drewe' and on TV in the latest series of *The Peep Show*. On stage, she has performed extensively with the Royal Shakespeare Company and most recently appeared in *Broken Glass* at the Tricycle Theatre in London. Emily gave a memorable performance in another Absolutely Radio production earlier this year playing a Harley-Davidson riding, Yoga teaching, single mum in 'The Gobetweenies' for BBC Radio 4 which will return next year.

Hugh Ross (Miff Ferrie)

Hugh Ross has recently been seen at Sheffield Crucible as Polonius/Gravedigger to John Simm's distinctive *Hamlet*, and as Christopher Soames, one of a chorus of cabinet ministers, in the eagerly awaited *Iron Lady* with Meryl Streep. He considers her a goddess. Hugh has also just been filming an episode of *Midsomer Murders*, playing a kindly Bishop, who survives that dangerous location; less luckily, he was also in Bulgaria, slain beneath the wings of a *Jabberwocky*."



Marilyn Imrie (Director)

...is one of the UK's hardest working and most successful Radio Directors. Most recently she directed the recent runaway R4 comedy success starring Brian Cox Felix Dexter and Laura Solon: *The Bob Servant Emails* by Neil Forsyth. For BBC Radio Scotland, *Sybil Law* the sitcom by Charlie Dore starring Una Maclean, and Radio 4 treasures *The Stanley Baxter Playhouse*, with the great man himself, and the *Rumpole* series starring Benedict Cumberbatch and Timothy West for BBC Radio 4.

Gordon Kennedy (Producer)

Has produced four series of 'Baggage' for Radio 4, the 90 minute Radio 3 Flann O'Brien spectacular 'Your Only Man', and a new Comedy drama hit for Radio 4 starring David Tennant 'The Gobetweenies' which will return for a second series next year, all directed by Marilyn Imrie. He has just finished producing *The Very Old Pretenders*, written and directed by Carl Gorham and coming to Radio 4 late night in September.

Annie Caulfield (Writer)

Award winning dramatist and travel writer Annie Caulfield last worked with Absolutely on the acclaimed 'Your Only Man', a life of Flann O'Brien with Ardal O'Hanlan, Pauline McLynn and Dara O'Brian in the cast. Her last play for Radio 4, 'On The Field', about Iraqi personnel in Basra was reviewed as ; "a new High watermark in radio drama." Lenny Henry starred in her Radio 3 play about the tragic life of Paul Robeson. She's just finished a book about spending half her life in a Spanish Cave and will be out of the cave working on television projects this autumn. "The cast in *Glass Chair Chair Glass* were so good it made me feel a bit weepy."



Full Production Credits

Producer	Gordon Kennedy
Director	Marilyn Imrie
Writer	Annie Caulfield
Studio	The Soundhouse Studios
Studio Engineer and Editor	Jerry O'Riordan
Studio Manager	Alison MacKenzie
Broadcast Manager	Sophie Tombling
Photographer	Richard Bailey
Financial Affairs	Lil Thornley
Production Company	Absolutely Productions Ltd

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Richard Bailey

Glass Chair Chair Glass

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