

TRAVESTIES

A PLAY BY TOM STOPPARD



The actors and their roles

Specific learning outcomes

Students will:

- understand the actor's development of their roles.
- respond to and reflect on the characters/ actor's performances in the play.

[These learning outcomes relate to the Communication and Interpreting in Drama (CI) strand in *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum*.]

Ross Duncan (Bennett)



Ross trained at the New Zealand Drama School in 1971 (Principal Nola Millar), and with the Mercury Theatre as an apprentice actor for the following two years (Artistic Director Tony Richardson). After acting and directing at theatres around the country, in 1981 he joined Theatre Corporate (Artistic Director Raymond Hawthorne) with the Community Theatre Company, then with the resident company for five years (Artistic Directors Paul Minifie, then Roger McGill), appearing in many plays including *King Lear*, *Three Sisters*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Tom and Viv*, *Fen* and *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*.

Ross was a member of the Mercury Theatre Company from 1986 to 1992 (Artistic Director Raymond Hawthorne). Roles during this period included Ned Weeks in *The Normal Heart*, The Protagonist in *Courting Blackbird*, Uncle Max in *The Sound of Music*, Alan Turing in *Breaking the Code*, Sir Anthony Blint in *Single Spies*, Bernie in *Ladies Night*, Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*, and CS Lewis in *Shadowlands*.

His work with ATC includes Michael in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, one of the quartet in *Travels with My Aunt*, Mr Rice in *Molly Sweeney*, John Hall in *The Herbal Bed*, Otter, Weasel and Gypsy in *Wind in the Willows*, and Sandy Moffat in *The Judas Kiss*.

Television appearances include DI Snow in *Lawless 1 & 2*, *Hercules*, *Xena*, *Young Hercules*, *Nga Tohu: Signatures* (Best Supporting Actor, TJ Awards), *Love Mussel*, and *Mataku*.

Film appearances include Wallace in *Jubilee* and Mr Goberg in *Eye of the Storm*.

Describe your character.

Bennett is the manservant to Henry Carr. However, at the end of the play it is revealed he is in fact the British Consul in Zurich. Carr's memory has demoted him from Consul to manservant. Bennett, the manservant, is an intellectual with "radical sympathies" – i.e. he supports the Bolsheviks. He likes champagne. Percy Bennett, the British consul, is an astute observer of international politics.

Stoppard's plays rely heavily on language – how did you learn the lines for your role?

Slowly and with difficulty. It was made harder by the complex structure of the language. Rewarding, though – eventually!

Did you undertake any preparation for your role?

I read up on the Russian Revolution, Tristan Tzara, James Joyce and Zurich.

Stoppard's plays are complex and sophisticated – what does it all mean to you?

Well, this play, two things mainly. The humanity of Henry Carr, his failings – he's funny; and World War I – how it caused chaos in every part of European life. This upheaval shaped the twentieth century.

Working with different actors and directors, you must learn many things.

Do you have an acting tip that has been particularly useful to you?

I count the actors, directors and theatres I have worked with and in as some of the richest things in my life. As to an acting tip – the craft is complex and challenging, composed of "tips" from so many great people.

What career path did you take to become an actor?

I read plays in the back rows of geography and biology at high school, played Bardolph in Henry V at school, and then did three plays with an amateur society, a year at New Zealand Drama School, then two years as an apprentice actor at the Mercury Theatre.

Michael Edward (Henry Carr)



Michael graduated from UNITEC School of Performing and Screen Arts in 2001, with an extensive list of screen and stage credits to his name before his training. He had already taken roles in *Xena*, *City Life*, *Shortland Street* and *One West Waikiki* among others. He had also appeared in the films *A Soldiers Sweetheart* and *Amazon High*.

Highlights during Michael's time at UNITEC included roles in *The Merchant of Venice*, *Suddenly Last Summer* and *Orpheus Descending*. A short film, *Nova*, in which he acted and co-wrote in his final year, is currently showing at the Auckland Film Festival.

Since graduation last year Michael has performed in *Measure for Measure* and *The Coffee Shop*, and worked on *Mercy Peak*. He also produced a show, *Darkness Descends*, which he took to the Fringe Festival in Wellington, and has founded a Shakespeare company, which is currently touring schools in Auckland.

Describe your character.

Henry Carr. Forgetful, vain, and British.

Stoppard's plays rely heavily on language – how did you learn the lines for your role?

Repetition – going over them again and again.

Did you undertake any preparation for your role?

I watched *The Importance of Being Earnest*, read critical essays on Stoppard.

Stoppard's plays are complex and sophisticated – what does it all mean to you?

The play is terribly exposing for an actor!

Working with different actors and directors, you must learn many things.

Do you have an acting tip that has been particularly useful to you?

Don't ever give up! Learn to take criticism. Be brave.

What career path did you take to become an actor?

I attended UNITEC Performing Arts School in Auckland.

Ross Girven (Tristan Tzara)



Ross trained at The New Zealand Drama School and, over the last twenty years, has worked extensively throughout New Zealand and Australian Theatre, Film and Television.

Favourite theatre productions in that time include *Footrot Flats* (Covert Theatre), *Galileo* and *Trafford Tanzi* (Downstage Theatre), *Side by Side by Sondheim* (Centrepoint Theatre) and, for the Mercury Theatre, *A View From The Bridge*, *Twelfth Night*, *Amadeus*, *Hamlet*, *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Courting Blackbird*, *The Sex Fiend* and *The Three Musketeers*.

He has performed in musicals including *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *West Side Story*, *South Pacific*, *Carousel*, *Jolson*, *Chess*, *The Secret Garden* and has toured New Zealand and Australia in *Cats* and *Blood Brothers*.

Ross has had roles in the television series *Gloss*, *Shortland Street*, *Water Rats*, *Typhon's People*, *High Tide* and *Marching Girls*, and the films *Dangerous Orphans* and *Ngati*.

For Auckland Theatre Company, Ross has appeared in *Foreskin's Lament* (Ken), *Cabaret* (Emcee) and *Into the Woods* (The Baker).

Describe your character.

Tristan Tzara. A French/Romanian figment of Henry Carr's imagination. Leader of an anti-art movement, radical freethinker, poet, anarchist, most often Ernest from *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

Stoppard's plays rely heavily on language – how did you learn the lines for your role?

I make it a habit to learn everyone's lines from the scene I am involved in, so that I know the words and the cues. I read the play over and over again so that I know what purpose my character has to fulfil in the piece. Through all that the words just sink in.

Did you undertake any preparation for your role?

I read the play many times. I read *The Importance of Being Earnest*. I researched Tzara on the net and read a book of his poetry. I researched Tom Stoppard and his comments on this play.

Stoppard's plays are complex and sophisticated – what does it all mean to you?

I find his plays challenging and funny and full of interesting, flawed characters that are great fun to play and watch. As to this play, it means whatever you want it to mean!

Working with different actors and directors, you must learn many things.

Do you have an acting tip that has been particularly useful to you?

Sit down, shut up, watch and learn!

What career path did you take to become an actor?

I wrote a play when I was seven years old, so I have always felt that this career chose me. I trained at the New Zealand Drama School and learned from everyone I've ever worked with.

Paul Gittins (Vladimir Lenin)



Paul is a familiar face, having worked extensively in film, television and theatre.

Film credits include *End of the Golden Weather*, *Other Halves*, *Whole of the Moon* and *Exposure*. Along with lead and featured roles in television drama such as *Adventurer*, *Hercules*, *Xena*, *Riding High*, *Shadowtrader* and *Steel Riders*, Paul was an original core cast member of *Shortland Street* for three years, playing the clinic boss Dr McKenna. Trading his white coat for a black one, Paul recently presented the popular documentary series *Epitaph*. He has also fronted *Shipwreck* and *Against the Odds*.

His extensive theatre background includes leading roles in *Hamlet*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Under Milkwood*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *King Lear* and *View from the Bridge*, to name just a few.

Describe your character.

My character is based on the real historical figure of Lenin. Most of what he says is taken from his actual writings. The character is parodied to some degree – although Tom Stoppard does try to capture something of Lenin's humanity.

Stoppard's plays rely heavily on language – how did you learn the lines for your role?

Slowly and bit by bit. I found Lenin's lines hard to get off the page. Perhaps this was to do with the fact that his lines were taken from his writings, rather than being specially created dialogue.

Did you undertake any preparation for your role?

I visited many Internet sites to read about the real Lenin. I also looked for any commentaries on the play as well. I took lessons on how to speak Russian and I got a Russian to speak onto a tape for the accent.

Stoppard's plays are complex and sophisticated – what does it all mean to you?

Thought provoking entertainment. Looks at a number of issues in an entertaining way. What is the role of art in society is one.

Working with different actors and directors, you must learn many things.

Do you have an acting tip that has been particularly useful to you?

Study other people's role insofar as they affect your own.

What career path did you take to become an actor?

I joined a small theatre company called Theatre Corporate at the relatively late age of 25. Being completely inexperienced, I undertook classes in movement, voice, and acting technique while gaining performing experience in public performances.

Sophia Hawthorne (Gwendolen Carr)



Sophia won the TVNZ Young Achievers Award in 1995 and gained a scholarship to study singing in New York.

Over the past five years she has worked extensively in the New Zealand film and theatre industries. Her film credits include, short films *Destroying Angel*, *Out Of The Blue*, *The Bar* and *She's Racing*, and feature films *Crime Story*, *When Love Comes Along* and *Savage Honeymoon*, for which she was nominated for Best Supporting Actress in the 2000 Film Awards. Television credits include *Mataku* and *Money for Jam*.

Sophia has performed for Auckland Theatre Company in productions of *Hair*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *Into the Woods*, *The Seagull*, *Social Climbers*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *Closer*, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and *Cabaret*. In addition, she has performed in *Double Beat*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, *The Seagull* (Circa), *Into the Woods* (Watershed), *Titus Adronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Crucible* and *The Sound of Music*.

Michael Hurst (James Joyce)



Michael has been described as a theatre animal. After an eight-year hiatus, during which he gained worldwide recognition as Iolaus in the American television series *Hercules – The Legendary Journeys*, he returned to the stage in 2001 as The Player in ATC's production of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, and found himself once again "at home". Michael's previous acting credits include the title roles in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, Arnold Bechoff in *Torch Song Trilogy*, Mozart in *Amadeus*, the Emcee (twice) in *Cabaret*, Koko in *The Mikado*, Barry in *Ladies' Night*, Macheath in *The Threepenny Opera* and the Gregorus in the groundbreaking Inside Out Theatre Production of *The Holy Sinner*.

Directing credits include *Ladies' Night*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cabaret*. Michael also directed many episodes of both *Hercules* and *Xena*, the feature film *Jubilee* and the one-hour television comedy drama *Love Mussel*, starring the late, great Kevin Smith.

Describe your character.

James Joyce, a major literary figure of the twentieth century. Intense and, in this play, extremely Irish! He goes from a caricature to a quite touching and passionate portrayal. Extremely witty and very intellectual.

Stoppard's plays rely heavily on language – how did you learn the lines for your role?

Quickly!

Did you undertake any preparation for your role?

A lot of reading – biographies of Joyce, his book *Ulysses* (which was absolutely fantastic!), listening to a rare recording of Joyce reading *Finnegans Wake*. I had spectacles made which replicated his eye condition – very myopic. I have to wear special contact lenses to counteract the effect!

Stoppard's plays are complex and sophisticated – what does it all mean to you?

Memory is mutable. Art is the coalescence of culture. Genius is essential – and to be treasured!

Working with different actors and directors, you must learn many things.

Do you have an acting tip that has been particularly useful to you?

Always search for new ideas! This doesn't stop with opening night!

What career path did you take to become an actor?

I started acting and didn't stop. I got spotted early (a year old!) and that was it!

Anna Meech (Cecily Carr)



Anna is a relative newcomer to the stage and screen, having graduated from UNITEC with a Bachelor of Performing and Screen Arts in 2000. Prior to formal training, Anna sang with the Opera NZ chorus in *La Traviata*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Don Giovanni*, *Turandot* and *Il Trovatore*, and studied at The Actor's Space. Highlights while studying at UNITEC include Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, Violet Venable in *Suddenly Last Summer* and Peppermint Patty in *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*. Since graduating, Anna has performed in The Silo's *Shakespeare's Shorts* as Beatrice, and in a one-act play, *Helium*, at the 2002 Wellington Fringe Festival. *Travesties* will be Anna's first play for Auckland Theatre Company.

Describe your character.

Cecily. Librarian. Bolshevik supported. Passionate. Organised. Efficient. Meticulous. Practical. Reliable. Responsible. Scholarly. Sexual. Eccentric.

Stoppard's plays rely heavily on language – how did you learn the lines for your role?

Repetition. I learnt most of it on my own, straight from the script and then had friends read in cues for me. Consulted a dictionary and encyclopaedias for the difficult bits.

Did you undertake any preparation for your role?

I viewed films. For the style - *Importance of Being Earnest*. For the period – *All Quiet on the Western Front*, WWI Documentary. For the political climate I sourced information on the Russian Revolution on the Internet and at the library.

Stoppard's plays are complex and sophisticated – what does it all mean to you?

I'm still grappling with this one! Stoppard's plays require a great deal of physical energy, vocal dexterity and variation. As to the meaning?...

Working with different actors and directors, you must learn many things.

Do you have an acting tip that has been particularly useful to you?

Faith. Trust. Flair. Dare.

What career path did you take to become an actor?

Learnt ballet from an early age. Took singing lessons and sang for the Opera chorus. Took acting classes at The Actors Space. Trained at Unitech – Bachelor of Performing and Screen Arts – for three years. I graduated in 2000.

Nancy Schroder (Nadya Krupskaya)



Nancy has an extensive list of acting credits, having worked in both the UK and New Zealand.

She has been involved in films, television productions and many theatre productions as well as working as a choreographer, teacher and in stage management.

Among her work Nancy has had roles in *Shortland Street*, *Hercules* and *Street Legal*. Her theatre roles have included *Twelfth Night*, *The Crucible*, *Private Lives*, *Daughters of Heaven* and *Helium* for the Wellington Fringe Festival.

Describe your character.

Nadya Krupskaya. Kind of face, warm, friendly. The embodiment of sincerity and modesty – almost puritan in her simplicity. All her relationships were built on truth and understanding. She was passionate about the Marxist cause – well before she met Lenin. A great teacher, a genius. Once she believed in a cause, she was committed.

Stoppard's plays rely heavily on language – how did you learn the lines for your role?

Because of the Russian language and accent needed, I learnt my lines from tape – having recorded my lines read by a real Russian. Therefore, from continuously practicing the accent the lines were absorbed. This is not the usual way I learn lines.

Did you undertake any preparation for your role?

Read much about Russia, asked friends who understood the politics of communism. Read Krupskaya's book *Memoirs of Lenin*. Recorded the voice of a Russian accent and language.

Stoppard's plays are complex and sophisticated – what does it all mean to you?

What I enjoy about this play is the debates, the arguments. What it means to me is political correctness is intellectuals' fascism, whatever label you put on it!

Working with different actors and directors, you must learn many things.

Do you have an acting tip that has been particularly useful to you?

To have faith in yourself, that you have been chosen for this part because you have those abilities needed. To enjoy, relish who you are, to give of you to your fellow actors – feed them as much as you feed yourself.

What career path did you take to become and actor?

I grew up in a theatrical environment of dance. Therefore I was involved in theatre from an early age. I went to ballet school, but finally realised a dream of becoming an actor later in life. Being involved in any aspect of theatre is a career path to acting.

The actors and their roles: classroom activities

Classroom activities have been developed specifically for:



Working on with a class prior to viewing the play



Working with a class after viewing the play



Associated activities using resource material generated by the play



Frozen in time (worksheet)

The following table details Stoppard's descriptions of the characters in the play and some quotes from the play about the characters.

- Choose a character and prepare a frozen statue giving your impression of the character. Consider how you will use facial expression, posture and position, to convey ideas of age, status and occupation.
- If possible, record these statues using a digital camera and put them on the wall of your classroom.
- Compare your impression of the character, before and after seeing the play, in your portfolio.

<i>Character</i>	<i>Stoppard's description</i>	<i>Quotes</i>
Henry Carr	Appears as a shabby and very old man, and also his youthful elegant self	
Tristan Tzara	The Dadaist. He was a short, dark-haired, very boyish-looking young man, and charming (his word). Wears a monocle.	
James Joyce	Aged 36. Wears a jacket and trousers from two different suits.	<p>He was Irish of course. Though not actually from Limerick, he was a Dublin man. (p5)</p> <p>To be in his presence was to be aware of amazing intellect bent on shaping itself into the permanent form of its own monument- the book the world now knows as <i>Ulysses</i>. (p6)</p> <p>A complex personality, an enigma, contradictory spokesman for the truth. (p7)</p>
Lenin	Aged 47.	An essentially simple man and yet an intelligent theoretician, bent as I am aware on the seemingly impossible task of reshaping the civilized world into a federation of standing committees of workers' deputies. (p7)
Bennett	Carr's manservant. Quite a weighty presence.	
Gwendolen	Carr's younger sister. Young and attractive but also a force to be reckoned with.	
Cecily	Also young and attractive and even more to be reckoned with. Also appears as her old self.	Cecily is rather pretty, and well bred as you surmised, but her views on poetry are old fashioned and her knowledge of the poets, as indeed of everything else, is eccentric, being based on alphabetical precedence. (p25)
Nadya	Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's wife aged 48.	



Exploring the roles of Lenin, Joyce and Tzara (activity)

Each of these three characters represents different approaches to life and literature.

The differences in their roles are apparent in their speech.

LENIN Today, literature must become party literature. Down with non-partisan literature! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become a part of the common cause of the proletariat, a cog in the social democratic mechanism. Publishing and distributing centres, bookshops and reading rooms, libraries and similar establishments must all be under party control. We want to establish and we shall establish a free press, free not simply from the police, but also from capital, from careerism, and what is more, free from bourgeois anarchist individualism! (p59)

JOYCE An artist is the magician put among men to gratify capriciously their urge for immortality. The temples are built and brought down around him, continuously and contiguously, from Troy to Flanders. If there is any meaning in any of it, it is what survives as art, yes even in the celebration of tyrants, yes even in the celebration of nonentities. What now of the Trojan War if it had been passed over by the artists touch? Dust. A forgotten expedition prompted by Greek merchants looking for new markets. A minor redistribution of broken pots. But it is we who stand enriched, by a tale of heroes, of a golden apple, a wooden horse, a face that launched a thousand ships - and above all, of Ulysses, the wanderer, the most human, the most complete of all heroes - husband, father, son, lover, farmer, soldier, pacifist, politician, inventor and adventurer...

It is a theme so overwhelming that I am almost afraid to treat it. And yet I with my Dublin Odyssey will double that immortality, yes by God there's a corpse that will dance for some time yet and leave the world precisely as it finds it. (p42)

TZARA My god. You bloody English Philistine - you ignorant smart-arse bogus bourgeois Anglo-Saxon prick. When the strongest began to fight for the tribe, and the fastest to hunt, it was the artist who became the priest-guardian of the magic that conjured the intelligence out of the appetites. Without him, man would be a coffee-mill. Eat-grind-shit. Hunt-eat-fight-grind-saw the logs-shit. The difference between being a man and being a coffee-mill is art. But that difference has become smaller and smaller and smaller. Art created patrons and was corrupted. It began to celebrate the ambitions and acquisitions of the pay-master. The artist has negated himself: paint-eat-sculpt-grind-write-shit.

Without art man was a coffee-mill: but with art man is a coffee-mill. That is the message of Dada. Dada dada dada dada dada dada dada dada dada dada dada dada dada dada dada... (p29)

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Explore the difference between each role through the following activity:

- Read the lines chosen for each character.
- Rehearse your voice for the character, concentrating on vocal techniques such as pace, use of pause, accent and intonation.
- Develop a frozen shape for the character that you will use before speaking your lines and another to finish with after speaking your lines.
- In your portfolio, record your frozen shapes and what you want to show about the character, and decisions that you have made about the use of your voice.
- Present your interpretation of the character to others in your class.

It is interesting to note how costume, props, makeup and physicality can change an actor's appearance. Below you see the headshots of the three actors playing Tzara, Lenin and Joyce. Underneath, you see them in character. Discuss the difference that these changes have made for the three actors.





Thinking critically about the performances (activity)

As a class discuss the performances by the actors in this play.

- Which actors stood out for you?
- What dramatic techniques did you notice the actors using to create their roles?
- How well did costume reflect the characters that were being played?
- Which scenes stood out for you?



From the horses mouth (activity)

In their interviews (pages 1-10), the actors identify the following techniques for preparing for an acting role:

Michael Edward:

"Don't ever give up! Learn to take criticism. Be brave."

Ross Girven:

"Sit down, shut up, watch and learn!"

Paul Gittins:

"Study other people's role insofar as they affect your own."

Michael Hurst:

"Always search for new ideas! This doesn't stop with opening night!"

Anna Meech:

"Faith. Trust. Flair. Dare."

Nancy Schroeder:

"To have faith in yourself, that you have been chosen for this part because you have those abilities needed. To enjoy, relish who you are, to give of you to your fellow actors – feed them as much as you feed yourself."

Choose three of these techniques to use when you are preparing for an acting role as part of your class work.

In your portfolio record the techniques that you use and how effective they were in helping to prepare your role.