

STATE ED

STATE THEATRE COMPANY
of South Australia presents

Volpone

by
Ben Jonson
Adapted by Emily Steel



STATE SA
THEATRE
COMPANY



men@play

*Please note that there is a scene where Volpone tries to rape Celia.
Although there is no nudity, this may be confronting to some viewers.

DURATION APPROX: 2 hrs 30 minutes (including interval)

SUITABLE FOR Years 10 - 12

DWS performance followed by a 20 - 30 min Q&A session

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Theatre Etiquette

THEATRE ETIQUETTE

“An audience member had clambered onto the stage of the Booth Theatre and tried to plug a cell phone charger into an outlet on the set of Hand to God.” – Playbill news July 2015

While this occurrence in New York seems pretty ridiculous, our State Theatre Company Audience Spy Panel have already clocked the following right here in South Australia; phones ringing, phones used as lights, note-taking, heckling of actors and people walking across the stage - all while the actors are performing onstage!

A live performance is a unique experience shared between performers and the audience. Unlike television or movies, the actors on stage can hear noise and see lights from the audience. So, as a courtesy to the performers and the others around you, please review the following information with your class before attending a performance.

Day with State performances

Please notify front of house when your school arrives; as schools are seated in order of arrival. Teachers must accompany students into the theatre and are responsible for their behaviour throughout the performance. Students will be asked to leave large school bags in the foyer.

Be on Time!

Some shows have a lock-out period where you won't be let into the theatre until a suitable break in the performance.

Running late for a matinee performance?

If your group is running late for a performance, please contact State Theatre Company's main number on 8415 5333 during working hours, or contact the venue after 5pm.

Note taking

Many teachers like students to take notes during a performance. This is distracting to actors on stage and other audience members, particularly when phones are used as lighting devices. Instead, notes should be written in the interval and after the show. If you are seeing a performance with a Q&A following, this is a good time to take notes. Perhaps allow class discussion time in the foyer after the show. If students have further questions after the performance, I am happy to respond.

Email: education@statetheatrecompany.com.au

Talking

Everyone attending the production deserves to see the play without distractions.

When someone in the audience talks, it ruins the story and spoils the mood being created on stage.

Leave food and drinks outside

Food and drinks are not permitted in the theatre. They make a mess and the noise is distracting to the actors and the rest of the audience.

Seats are for sitting

Do not place your feet on the seat in front of you. Always walk along the row rather than jumping over seats. For safety reasons stay in your seat at the end of the show until the auditorium lights go up.

Turn OFF all electronic devices

Mobile phones should be turned off during a performance, as they can interfere with the sound system. Phones used to SMS give off a glow that the actors can see from the stage and is distracting to them and others around you. All recording devices (camera, MP3 recorders, and video recorders) are illegal to use unless you have prior copyright permission.

Feel free to laugh, cry and applaud

Show your appreciation of the performance (the actors love it!!)

Length of performance

The length of a performance in the Study Guide is an estimation made during rehearsals. For updated details check out our website: www.statetheatrecompany.com.au

Suitability

Warning guides are usually given on all productions in our brochure and online. Should you have further questions please ring the Education Manager for more information.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: The BAD Audience Member!

A fun way to review theatre etiquette with your students is to have them point out bad audience behaviour during a show. Here's one way to illustrate this concept:

1. Have one or two students come up to the front of the room and present something to the class. They can tell a story, present an oral report, or tell some jokes – it doesn't matter what they present; the important thing is that they are the "actors" and the class is the audience.
2. Once they are into the activity, you (the teacher) leave the room and then re-enter. Enter loudly, chew gum, step on people's feet, talk to them, etc. Be the worst audience member you can possibly be. Find a seat and continue to talk to others, ask what's going on in the performance, take pictures, talk on your cell phone etc.
3. Afterward, ask the class to list all the bad behaviour. Write these on the board. Include coming in late, talking, gum chewing, waving to friends, etc.
4. Then ask the audience members how they felt when the bad audience member came into the theatre. Could they hear the actors? Were they distracted? And finally ask the actors how they felt. Could they concentrate on their performance? They may have ended up listening to you instead of continuing with their presentation!

The important goal of this activity is for students to actively see and feel what it's like to have someone disrupt their theatre experience, both from the performer and the audience side of the stage.

After you come back from seeing the State Theatre show, review the experience with your students. Were they "good" or "bad" audience members? How was the experience of watching the show given their behavior and the behavior of other audience members?

Cast & Creatives

Volpone

Paul Blackwell

Mosca

James Smith

Corbaccio

Edwin Hodgeman

Corvino

Patrick Graham

Voltore

Geoff Revell

Lady Would-Be

Caroline Mignone

Celia

Elizabeth Hay

Bonario

Matt Crook

Judge

Carmel Johnson

Director

Nescha Jelk

Designer

Jonathon Oxlade

Lighting designer

Geoff Cobham

Composer

Will Spartalis

Voice & Text Coach

Simon Stollery

Fight Choreography

Duncan Maxwell

Stage Manager

Bruce Bolton

Assistant Stage Manager

Alex Hayley

Playwright

BEN JONSON

(1572-1637)

Ben Jonson was an English dramatist, poet, and literary critic. He is generally regarded as the second most important English dramatist, after William Shakespeare.

Born in Westminster, England in 1572 he studied at Westminster school, where he learned the classics. He didn't attend University, instead becoming an apprentice bricklayer, following in his stepfather's trade. Disenchanted by this career, he soon left England to become a soldier in the Netherlands with reports that he killed an enemy in single combat. He married Ann Lewis in 1594 and they had three children, two of whom died at a young age.



Jonson returned to London in 1597, where he became an actor, before finding his niche as a writer. His first comedy, *Every Man in His Humour* was presented at the Globe Theatre in 1598. Jonson soon established a reputation as one of the major social satirists of the English dramatic tradition. He popularised the genre of dramatic comedy, a style that focuses on characters with traits that dominate their personality, desires and conduct.

Jonson was known for being hot-headed and quarrelsome, arguing with actors, audiences and other writers throughout his career. He was sent to prison as the co-author of an offensive play called, *The Isle of Dogs*; he fought a duel with a fellow actor, killing him and escaping prison by pleading the law of 'Benefit of clergy' where he recited bible verses, and his play *Sejanus* earned him a summons before the Privy Council.

At the beginning of the reign of King James I of England in 1603, Jonson collaborated with designer Inigo Jones on a series of Court Masques, a popular form of entertainment, for the King and aristocracy. He wrote around 35 Masques over the next thirty years.

Jonson's best plays were written over the next decade; *Volpone or the Fox* (1605), *The Alchemist* (1610) and *Bartholomew Fayre: A Comedy* (1614) before the flop *The Devil is an Ass* (1616). His health began to decline after a series of setbacks drained his strength and damaged his reputation. The death of King James and the accession of King Charles I in 1625 left Jonson feeling neglected by the new court. Jonson died on 6 August 1637 and was buried in Westminster Abbey, with the inscription, "O Rare Ben Johnson" over his grave.

Plays

The Isle of Dogs, (1597)

Every Man in His Humour, (1598)

Cynthia's Revels, (1600)

The Poetaster, (1601)

Sejanus His Fall, (1603)

Eastward Ho, (1605)

Volpone or the Fox, (1605-06)

Epicoene, or the Silent Woman, (1609)

The Alchemist, (1610)

Catiline His Conspiracy, (1611)

Bartholomew Fair, (1614)

The Devil is an Ass, (1616)

The Staple of News, comedy (1626)

The New Inn, or The Light Heart, (1629)

The Magnetic Lady, or Humors Reconciled, (1632)

The Sad Shepherd, (1637), unfinished

Mortimer His Fall, (1641)

Adaptation

EMILY STEEL

Emily Steel is originally from Wales and is now based in Adelaide. She has written for stage and radio in Australia and the UK. Her work includes: *Sepia* for RiAus (Adelaide Fringe 2012 Tour Ready award), *Rocket Town* (Adelaide Fringe 2011 inSPACE award), *The Clock* for ActNow and RiAus, *Man in a bag* for AC Arts and Polygraph Collective, and *Bite* and *Frank and the Bear* for BBC Radio 4. She trained as an actor at the Oxford School of Drama and completed the Writers' Programme at the Royal Court Theatre in London. She has a degree in English from Oxford University and a master's in Science and Society from UCL/Imperial College London. The development of her new play *Rabbits* has been supported by State Theatre Company of South Australia and inSPACE. *Volpone* is her first production with State Theatre Company.



INTERVIEW WITH EMILY

1. What is the process when adapting a 'classic' script?

I don't know. I'm not sure there is one. I suspect that every time someone wants to create their own version of an existing play, they approach it in a different way. I don't think there should be any particular rules around respecting the work or the original playwright's intention - as long as the work is out of copyright - I refer you to the shenanigans over Simon Stone's version of *Death of a Salesman* at Belvoir.

Read about this here: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/theatre/dobber-brings-down-curtain-on-belvoirs-take-on-miller-20121016-27p4w.html>.

The following is the process of adapting *Volpone* for State Theatre;

I first talked with the director, Nescha, about a radical update; keeping the story, but completely rewriting the text - in the vein of Richard Bean's *One Man, Two Guvnors*. However, we decided to keep Jonson's verse. So began a process of compromise; I wrote new songs and rewrote the mountebank's speech (which instead of verse was originally in prose), and updated parts of the verse so that the references would make sense to 21st century Adelaide audiences instead of 17th century English ones. Then we decided it wasn't right, so I started again. (It's not unusual for a first draft of any play to be very different to the final draft.) We wanted to keep Jonson's main plot, focusing on the corrupting power of money - which is the theme that remains relevant with today's society - aiming to make that story engaging and meaningful for today's audiences.

We also needed to cut the running time of the play in half, because three hours is too long. So I cut the subplot with Sir Politic Would-Be and Peregrine, because it didn't add anything to the story we wanted to tell. I also cut the 'fools' - Castrano the eunuch; Androgyno the hermaphrodite and Nano a dwarf, because they didn't seem funny in the context of the updated version. Then I streamlined some of the action by combining short scenes into one bigger scene, and trimmed some of the longer speeches to speed up the dialogue.

The style of theatrical storytelling has also changed over time. In Jonson's original text, his main characters tell the audience their plan at the beginning, giving the audience the pleasure of knowing

what was going to happen. However, contemporary playwrights tend to avoid exposition and deliberately leave gaps in the story for the audience to fill, asking the audience to play a more active role. So I cut the beginning of the play, hoping that the story that unfolds will be a surprise.

I think it's reasonable to ask whether my version of *Volpone* is truly an 'adaptation', or a massive editing job. I have cut and reshaped Jonson's play rather than rewritten it. How much do you need to change an original text in order to call it a new adaptation?

2. What challenges does it present?

Changing sensibilities? It took me a while to work out how to deal with Celia's story. I love a black comedy, and a lot of *Volpone* is pretty dark, but I found the treatment of Celia really horrible. It's hard to say whether 17th century audiences would have found it funny, or whether it was shocking even then. I had a very strong urge to save her somehow, to make her *win*. But it would have been too easy, too glib, and it would have undermined what we wanted to say about money and power and society. So what happens to her remains horrible, and she doesn't win, and sadly that's as truthful a story in 2015 as it would have been in 1606.

3. What are 3 things you'd advise students who are adapting or updating a script?

- 1) Pick a play that is out of copyright - you don't want the estate of Samuel Beckett shutting you down the night before you open.
- 2) Work out why you're choosing *this* play, and what you want your adaptation to achieve.
- 3) Go crazy. Seriously. Change as much as you want, as wildly as you want. Maybe you won't like it - and then you can take it back to the original. Or maybe it'll really work. Maybe you'll change it so radically you'll have a whole new play on your hands. Take risks. The purists might not like it, but who cares?

4. What is your relationship with the director when adapting the script?

My working relationship with Nescha has been pretty close. We've worked together before, on my play *Sepia*, which Nescha directed for Adelaide Fringe 2012, so I know she's very smart and I trust her. Nescha asked me to work on *Volpone*, and it was her idea to adapt it, so it's been important from the beginning that my version of the script fits with her vision of the play.

I'd go away and work on each draft and then send it to Nescha to see what she thought. We have disagreed about a few things, and then one of us has had to talk the other one round. Paul Blackwell, who plays Volpone, also gave us his thoughts and suggestions as we were developing the script, and his perspective as a performer has been really valuable.

5. How long has the adaptation taken and how many versions have you created?

Nescha and I first met and talked about *Volpone* more than a year ago. I sent her the first draft in November 2014, then a second and third in March and April this year. The third draft had a few small tweaks and became the rehearsal draft. You can't really know how the script will work until you see it on its feet - so there have also been a number of small changes to the script in rehearsal. How many drafts is that? Five? At least.

Director

NESCHA JELK

Nescha is the Resident Director at State Theatre Company. She graduated from the Flinders Drama Centre directing course in 2010 with First Class Honours and a University Medal. In 2010 she won the Helpmann Academy's Bendigo and Adelaide Bank Award.

For State Theatre Company, Nescha has directed *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Othello*, *Jesikah* and *Random*. Other directing credits include *Alice and Peter Grow Up* (Milk Theatre Collective), *Hamlet* (The Actor's Folio), and *Sepia* (RiAus) which was awarded the 2012 Adelaide Fringe Tour Ready Award.



Nescha has worked extensively as an assistant director for numerous companies including State Theatre Company, Eleventh Hour, Brink Productions, Belvoir, Bell Shakespeare Company and Sydney Theatre Company. She assistant directed *Masquerade* (STCSA/Griffin Theatre Company) which premiered in the 2015 Sydney Festival and featured in Adelaide's 2015 Come Out Festival.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

1. What attracted you to the play *Volpone*?

It was around the time of the Joe Hockey's 2014 budget speech, entitled '*The End of the Age of Entitlement*' and the infamous photo of his post budget speech cigar. I felt like altruism in Australia is at an all-time low and wanted to make a show that explored greed and avarice. *Volpone* is a grotesque, black comedy that does just that.

2. Why did the play need adapting?

I knew that I wanted the play to run under two hours, so I asked Emily to trim the play. This was also to ensure that I had as much rehearsal time as possible for each minute in the play, as comedies demand a lot of time for precision of timing, as does the verse. So a subplot involving two characters called Sir Politic and Peregrine was cut, along with the three fool characters Nano, Castrone, and Androgyno. However, Politic's wife Lady Would-Be is still in our version of the play.

Lastly, there were a lot of instances in which characters discuss their plots before carrying the plots out. Emily cut out some of the 'plotting' moments, so that the audience can discover the con as it plays out, which is more fun and surprising.

3. Can you talk about the process of adapting the play with Emily?

Emily and I have met many times over the past year, talking about the ideas in the play that interested us, the story that we wanted to tell, the way that we wanted to adapt it, etc. We experimented with a few different ideas. At one point, Emily had written a number of different extra songs to put in the show. We also tried putting contemporary references into the language. In the end, we realised that the world that Jonson gave us through his language was so rich, that our main task was in editing and cutting the play, rather than rewriting - any major additions or starkly contemporary references stuck out a bit too much. So Emily did many subtle, small, undiscernable changes to the text - replacing archaic words with more familiar ones so that jokes make more sense for contemporary audiences, or doing things like turning the four Avocatori Judges from the original into a single character.

4. Paul had been cast as Volpone right from the beginning. What drew you to him for this role?

As a teenager, I had watched Paul in productions at the State Theatre Company like *The Mystery of Irma Vep* and *Scapin*, in which he demonstrated masterful clowning skills. Those shows have always stuck out to me, so I have wanted to work with him for a long, long time. Casting Paul in this show was a complete no-brainer. It has been a joy to work with him.

5. Each of the 'gulls' have a different intent and purpose, what did you see in each actor that made them ideal for their characters?

I was looking for actors with comedic sensibilities, that could handle Jonson's language, who were interested in the politics of the play and who were going to make lots of creative 'offers' in the room.

6. What do you hope students take away from this play?

The big question I hope everyone comes away with, young or old, is; 'Does money infect us, and are we as immune to it as we'd like to think?' I'd also like them to think about the gender politics in the play. In all, the world that Jonson has given us in *Volpone* is utterly horrific, but disturbingly familiar.



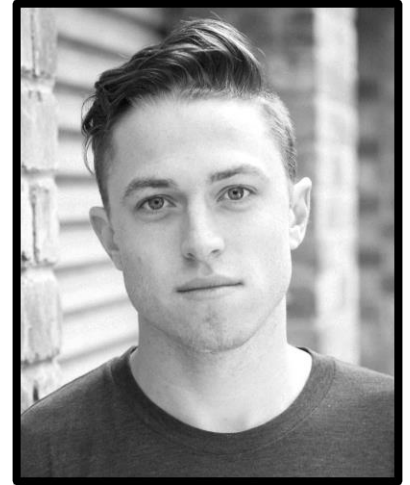
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Actor Profile

JAMES SMITH - Mosca

James is an acting graduate of Flinders Drama Centre. For State Theatre Company, James has appeared in *Neighbourhood Watch*, *Othello* and *This is Where We Live*. His studies at Flinders Drama Centre and time spent working at State Theatre Company have given him a good foundation and the chance to play many challenging and rewarding roles; as well as the opportunity to work with respected directors and teachers including David Meador, Rosalba Clemete, Tom Healy, Alirio Zavarce, Renato Musolino, Nescha Jelk, Julian Meyrick and Jon Halpin.

In 2014, James was awarded the Bendigo Bank Helpmann Award for emerging artist and has received a SASA award for Best Performance in Aaron Nassau's *Birdbath*.



INTERVIEW WITH JAMES

1. Of the roles that you've done with State Theatre, this is your first comedy role. How differently do you approach a comedy?

You can't approach it any differently from anything else. I think the trick you can fall into with comedy is thinking that you have to play everything really funny, like everything's a joke. But actually the comedy comes from playing the truth from moment to moment. So in that regard, it's kind of the same. You need to be constantly striving for the truth in each moment.

2. What attracted you to the character of Mosca?

I like Mosca because even though he plays low status, he's the smartest character in the piece. He's the one pulling the strings. He's the one who sets the marble run in action, so to speak. He watches from afar, he's in the shadows, and I like that in Mosca. He waits. He bides his time.

3. How difficult is the language when beginning to understand the script?

I found this particularly difficult. Because it's not only in the learning of the lines, it's the amount of lines. And not only is it the amount of lines, but it's how the language is written. And then on top of that you have to respect the rhythm and the meter. So there are a few different sides you need to tackle it from. The technical and the character side as well. So I found this one very difficult.

4. What do you think is the pivot point when Mosca changes from serving Volpone to wanting to take the money for himself?

I think the pivot point probably has to be when Volpone, in thinking that he's setting up another one of his ruses, signs his inheritance over to Mosca; making Mosca his heir and then pretends to be dead. In that moment, when Volpone's robe is put on Mosca and his name inscribed in the will, I think that's a moment when Mosca smells blood, so to speak. He sees his opportunity to take it all. "*To cousin him of all would be but a cheat well placed, no man would construe it a sin.*"

5. What are the challenges in this role?

Acting opposite so many brilliant actors, and feeling like you have to match up and be just as good as they are. Also everyone else is kind of playing a character role, whereas Mosca is a "straight man" for lack of a better term. So that's kind of challenging. The amount of time he's on stage is a challenge. As well as the specificity with which he needs to speak; a lot of his dialogue is about what is going to be happening next or why things have happened the way they have. Setting things in place so that they

work out in the end. So a lot of that has to be made really clear, otherwise the audience isn't going to know what stage they're up to. He has to be really on point.

PATRICK GRAHAM

For State Theatre Company, Patrick has appeared in *Blasted*, *Buried Child*, *Three Sisters*, *The Misanthrope*, *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, *Lion Pig Lion* and *Equus*. He also appeared in Angela Betzien's award winning play *The Dark Room* for Flying Penguin Productions, as part of State Theatre Company's umbrella production in 2013.

For Windmill Theatre, Patrick performed in *Big Bad Wolf* in Adelaide, Brisbane's Out of the Box Festival and at Melbourne Theatre Company. Patrick has also performed in other productions for Windmill Theatre including *Fugitive*, (for Adelaide Festival, and Windmill's main season), *The Wizard of Oz*, (for Windmill's main season, and Sydney Theatre Company), as well as, *Boom Bah*, (which toured nationally and internationally).



For floogle, a multi-award winning independent company Patrick co-founded and was an ensemble member of for several years, he performed in *One Long Night in the Land of Nod* (best new work Advertiser Award), also shown at The Old Fitzroy with the Tamarama Rock Surfers, *Black Crow Lullabies* (Best Original Work Adelaide Fringe Award) and *The Homecoming* where his portrayal of Lenny earned him an Advertiser Oscart Award (Actor on the Rise).

Patrick's television credits include *Blue Heelers*, *Stingers*, *Fergus McPhail* and *McLeod's Daughters*. Film credits are, *A Month of Sundays* (Matt Saville), *The King is Dead* (Rolf De Heer), and *Angela's Decision* (Matt King).

INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK

1. Corvino is already a wealthy man, why is he so insistent about getting Volpone's money, even to the point of 'lending' his wife?

I feel he is enveloped with greed and a desire for power. I think Johnson is saying that people with this greed, often sacrifice something that is precious or dear to them, and in this case it is his wife – someone he guards and protects to ridiculous extents.

There are other possibilities; that he views her only as a possession; or that in his jealousy he thinks it is what she actually desires and is. There are many interpretations that can be made and you will have to wait and see the choice we made. That's what rehearsing is about. It is a time for offers and trying out different interpretations until you arrive on the one that suits the actors, the rest of the play's tone or even what the ensemble want to say with the piece.

*Come I am not jealous
Faith I am not, I, nor never was.
It is a poor unprofitable humour*

2. Why do you think Corvino reacts so viciously to Celia dropping her handkerchief to the Scoto?

I think that he is jealous of anyone around Celia, which is why he keeps her locked away. The decision that the actor playing Celia, Lizzy, the director, Nescha, and I arrived at is; that the unspoken marital contract between the two is one where she loves him and he believes she has married possibly for money which feeds his insecurities. Of course there are possible holes in this according to the text, but it is a fuel that drives the character nonetheless.

3. What attracted you to the role of Corvino?

His horribleness! I love the world of this place and the despicable characters that Johnson has penned. It's great to get down and get dirty in a gritty, grotesque, foul, abhorrent, world.

4. How difficult is it to find the motivations for a character like Corvino? E.g. Do you create empathy with him?

You have to love the character you are playing. You have to find the thing in the "evil" character that is redeeming or human or at least something that you connect to in a positive way.

5. What is the most challenging part of playing Corvino?

The most challenging part has been finding where the relationship of Corvino and Celia sits in a comedy and how to interpret that for a modern audience.

6. What research do you do before beginning rehearsals and why is this important?

Text, text, text! With a play in verse from the early 17th century the majority of research is to understand what is being said. Also when doing a modern spin, it is thinking about how the themes and world of the play can be translated to our world. It's important to do this work, but then also come to the table fresh and be able to be adaptable to what else is happening in the room. A lot of "research" is also just daydreaming and allowing your imagination to run away with ideas. Inspiration can arrive at the oddest times!



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Synopsis

Volpone (the Fox) is a rich, manipulative con artist. Along with his servant Mosca, they are playing a cunning and farcical game of deceit with three 'gulls'; Voltore, Corvino and Corbaccio, all of whom are circling, determined to be Volpone's sole heir. Volpone feigns deathly illness to urge them to shower him with gifts to gain his favour and money.

Mosca assures each hopeful that they are the only one that Volpone has honoured in his will. First Voltore, a lawyer, then Corbaccio, an old man; and the merchant, Corvino. Mosca cunningly convinces Corbaccio to disinherit his own son leaving his fortune to Volpone, and Corvino to get his wife to sleep with Volpone, saying that the excitement would bring on the demise of the old man. Finally, Mosca tells Bonario, Corbaccio's son, that his father is about to disinherit him and leads him to a place where he can witness his father's betrayal.

Lady Politic Would-Be also arrives to sit with Volpone, *"I must visit you more a days, and make you well – Laugh and be lusty."* She is so talkative that Volpone fears she will really make him sick. To relieve his master, Mosca tells the lady that her husband is off in a gondola with a courtesan. She leaves in hot pursuit.

While Bonario is hiding, waiting for his father, Corvino brings his wife, Celia and demands she lie with the old fox; insisting that Volpone is too old to harm her. However, when he leaves Volpone leaps from his couch and forces himself upon Celia, to her horror. Bonario appears just in time to save her, and Mosca and Volpone are in terror of exposure over their ruined plot.

Taken in by Mosca's lies, Voltore promises to keep Bonario from accusing Volpone of rape and Corvino of villainy and orders the young man arrested. Corvino and Corbaccio also testify against Celia and Bonario. Adding to the testimony, Mosca presents Lady Would-Be, who tells the court that Celia is a courtesan, seen with her husband Politic in a gondola. The innocent Celia and Bonario are sent to prison.

Volpone, gloating over his deceptions, sends word that he has died and left Mosca his heir before disguising himself at a court officer. However, the deception begins to unravel as Mosca plans to keep the fortune, so Volpone exposes his behaviour and that of the 'gulls.' The court sentences each conspirator according to the severity of the crime. Bonario is restored his father's inheritance and Celia is allowed to return to her father with her dowry intact.

Plot

Volpone takes place over the course of one day.

ACT I Scene 1

Volpone is a rich con artist, with no heir to his fortune. He pretends illness, gathering the gulls; Voltore, a lawyer; Corbaccio, an old gentlemen; and Corvino, a merchant, around him. They wait for his death, hoping to inherit his considerable wealth. Each of them is willing to do anything to be the sole heir and lavish Volpone with gifts. Voltore brings a plate, Corvino brings a pearl and a diamond and Corbaccio brings a worthless and probably poisoned vial of medicine.

Mosca separately convinces each gull that they are the sole heir to Volpone's fortune. He talks Corbaccio into disinheriting his own son and making Volpone his heir;

Mosca: *Produce your will – where without thought,
Or lease regard, unto your proper issue,
A son so brave and highly meriting,
The stream of your diverted love hath thrown you
Upon my master, and made him your heir
He cannot be so stupid, or stone-dead,
But out of conscience and mere gratitude*

Corbaccio: *He must pronounce me his?*

Volpone and Mosca laugh at the 'gulls' gullibility, "*Why this is better than rob churches, or grow fat by eating, once a month, a man.*"

Lady Politic Would-be, the wife of an English knight arrives to offer to sit with Volpone to keep him company through his illness, but is sent away.

Mosca describes Corvino's wife, Celia as one of the most beautiful women in Italy; "*A beauty ripe as harvest! Whose skin is whiter than a swan all over, and flesh that melteth in the touch to blood. Bright as your gold, and lovely as your gold.*" He adds fuel to the fire by telling Volpone she is kept under lock and key by her husband. Volpone vows to see her for himself by wearing a disguise.

ACT 2 Scene 1

Volpone disguised as the mountebank Scoto Mantua, gives a speech selling his cure for all diseases and suffering. At the end of the speech, he asks the crows to toss him their handkerchiefs, and Celia who has been listening from her window above drops her handkerchief. Corvino arrives and flies into a jealous rage, sending Scoto Mantua (Volpone), Mosca and the crowd away. Volpone having seen Celia lusts after her and Mosca vows to deliver her to Volpone.

ACT 2 Scene 2

Corvino drags Celia into his room and chastises her for her behaviour out of the window. "*You were an actor with your handkerchief – which he most sweetly kissed in the receipt, and might, no doubt, return it with a letter, and point the place where you might meet – your sister's, your mother's or your aunt's might serve the turn.*"

He tells Celia that she can no longer go to Church, cannot stand near windows and must do everything backwards, even speaking. *"I will keep thee backwards. Thy lodging shall be backwards – thy walk backwards – thy prospect, all be backwards – and no pleasure, that thou shalt know but backwards."* Mosca arrives telling Corvino that the mountebank's oil has made Volpone feel better. He alludes to a young woman being sought for Volpone who could help restore his failing health or with too much excitement make him unwell again. If Corvino knew such a person, then Volpone would choose them for his heir. Corvino decides that his own wife, Celia, is the woman. Corvino finds his wife crying from their earlier encounter and tells her to dress her best for a feast at Volpone's place.

ACT 2 Scene 3

Mosca finds Bonario, Corbaccio's son, and informs him of his father's plans to disinherit him. He tells Bonario to catch Corbaccio signing the documents at Volpone's house and hides him in the cupboard.

ACT 3 Scene 1

Lady Politic returns. She rambles on about philosophy and poets, but Volpone is exasperated by her talkativeness, *"Oh spirit of patience help me."* Mosca rescues Volpone by telling the Lady that her husband has been seen in a gondola with a courtesan. She runs off to catch him in the act.

ACT 3 Scene 2

Corvino and Celia arrive. Celia doesn't want to be unfaithful with Volpone, *"I will take down poison, eat burning coals, do anything."* Corvino has none of it saying, that Volpone is too decrepit to do anything. He leaves Celia. When alone, Volpone suddenly leaps out of bed and attempts to seduce Celia, wooing her with lavish gifts and singing of her beauty. Celia refuses his advances, at which point Volpone says, *"Yield, or I'll force thee."* But Bonario, who has witnessed the scene from his hiding place, leaps out and rescues Celia and they run away. Mosca comes in wounded, having been struck by Bonario's sword.

Corbaccio arrives and Mosca tells him it was his son Bonario, who has vowed to kill Corbaccio. He leaves and Voltore enters having overheard Corbaccio's plans to change his will. Mosca tells him that Bonario is enraged and wants to kill Corbaccio, and then Voltore would inherit both fortunes. He tells Voltore how Bonario took Celia and is claiming to, *"Accuse his father, defame my patron (Volpone), defeat you."* Voltore tells him they are going to court.

Interval

ACT 4, Scene 1

The second half begins in court. Celia and Bonario have informed the judge of Volpone's attack and demand that Volpone be brought to court so the judge's *"Eyes may bear strong witness of his strange impostures."* Voltore strongly objects, portraying Bonario and Celia as lovers; Corvino as an innocent jilted husband; and Corbaccio as a wounded father nearly killed by his evil son. Lady Politic comes in and identifies Celia as the seducer of her husband and the court is further convinced when the supposedly ill Volpone enters the courtroom. The judge orders Celia and Bonario be arrested and separated.

ACT 5, Scene 1

Volpone returns feeling some of the symptoms he has been faking, *"My left leg began to cramp, and I apprehended straight some power had struck me with a dead palsy. Well! I must be merry, and shake it off."* Happy with how their plan is going Volpone decides to spread a rumour of his death, and to leaving Mosca his fortune. The plan goes off perfectly, and all three 'gulls' are fooled.

ACT 5, Scene 2

Volpone then disguises himself as a court officer, so that he can gloat without being recognised.

ACT 5, Scene 3

The court is informed of Volpone's death and Mosca is called to appear in court.

ACT 5, Scene 4

Volpone feels that his plan is coming undone and calls for Mosca, but is informed that Mosca has locked them out of the house.

ACT 5, Scene 5

Realising that Mosca has double-crossed him, Volpone confronts him. But Mosca won't let him return to the living, unless Volpone gives him a share of his wealth. Rather than let Mosca share his money, he turns them both in, taking off his disguise and revealing his deception. The court orders Volpone to be sent to prison and Mosca a slave galley. Voltore is disbarred, Corbaccio is stripped of his property, which is given to his son Bonario, Celia is sent home to her family with her dowry, and Corvino is publicly humiliated, forced to wear donkey's ears while being rowed around the canals of Venice.

EPILOGUE

Volpone is in prison, but has played the system again and has retained his wealth. Mosca is brought in. The game is on again.....

Characters

Volpone (the Fox)

Is the protagonist of the play. His name means 'the fox' in Italian. He is a sly, scheming and wily fox disguised as an aristocrat. He is lustful and greedy, but preys on others' greed; pretending to be ill and near to death, encouraging them to buy his favour. Volpone worships his money, which he has acquired through cons, such as the one he plays on Voltore, Corbaccio and Corvino. To continue his deception, he disguises himself as an invalid, a mountebank, a seducer, and an officer of the Court.

Volpone has no children, but has his parasite/servant, Mosca with whom he plans his cons.

Volpone is incapable of generosity and only fails in his greedy aspirations due to his gloating; handing over his entire estate to Mosca instead of giving Mosca anything. His attempted rape of Celia reveals a darker side of his character and becomes the catalyst for his downfall to prison.

Mosca

Mosca is named after the fly. Mosca is Volpone's parasite and servant. He executes Volpone's ideas and comes up with the necessary lies, showing no scruples about deceit. Mosca races from one fool to the next, keeping them all on the hook, spreading new disinformation as necessary.

Mosca begins as the clingy, concerned servant, but grows in independence and confidence. He becomes possessed by greed and attempts to move out of his class into power and privilege. However, his attempt fails, as Volpone exposes them both and is punished for trying to break out of his class.

Voltore

Voltore is named for the Vulture. He is a lawyer and uses his professional skills to prosecute the innocent. By profession, he is adept in the use of words and deceit. Voltore is a social climber, conscious of his position in his society and resentful at being overtaken by others on the way up. He is easily manipulated, changing stories quickly to gain favour as Volpone's heir, lying in court, for which he is eventually disbarred.

Corvino

Is named for the crow. He is a Venetian merchant and an extremely vicious and dishonourable character, with low self-esteem. He is a jealous husband, threatening acts of physical violence to Celia and her family in order to gain control over her. He is concerned with financial gain, easily being manipulated into providing his wife for Volpone's pleasure. Corvino has no trouble defaming his wife in court, *"I hope that she were onward to her damnation, if there be a hell greater than wh0re and woman."*

Corbaccio

Is named for the raven. He is a doddering old businessman who is deaf, decrepit and approaching his own death; likely to die before Volpone. He crosses the stage with the speed of a snail and his deafness ensures he gets to the point five minutes after everyone else. He wants to be Volpone's heir, and is in denial about his own mortality. He is convinced by Mosca to disinherit his son, to gain the favour of Volpone and quickly believes that his son wants to kill him. Corbaccio shows no sign of concern for Volpone, delighting openly in reports of Volpone's worsening symptoms.

Celia

Celia is the voice of goodness in the play and is extremely beautiful. Her name means 'sky' or 'heaven'. The wife of Corvino, she is committed to him, even though he treats her horribly. She has a faith in God and sense of honour. The turning point of the play comes when she says 'no' to Volpone's advances.

Bonario

Is the son of Corbaccio. He is an upright youth who remains loyal to his father even when his father perjures against him in court, "*I will sit down, and rather wish my innocence should suffer, then I resist the authority of a father.*" He heroically rescues Celia from Volpone and represents bravery and honour.

Lady Would-Be

She chatters endlessly in the manner of the parrot, impacting Volpone in his sick-bed who compares her to that of the storm, "*The storm comes toward me, the dreadful tempest of her breath.*"

She is a vulgar and shallow English gentlewoman who is ready to offer Volpone her own unique brand of sexual healing for a reward. She is vain, but hides her defects behind layers of cosmetics and dress. She is well read and inclined to let everyone know this or anything else about her, although she isn't very intelligent. She is jealous of her husband and sets off to catch him in the arms of a Venetian courtesan. She then gives false testimony at the trial, accusing Celia of being that courtesan.

Judge

The Judge is corrupt, tending to listen to scandal rather than looking at the evidence.

Themes

"Greed that overreaches and causes its own undoing is the primary target of Ben Jonson's satire, Volpone."

GREED (AVARICE)

The main theme surrounds the question of greed and how much is enough? Avarice is extreme greed for wealth or material gain.

Volpone, a wealthy man relishes in his deception and his greed of wanting more, *"Women and men of every sex and age, that bring me presents, send me plate, coin, jewels, with hope that when I die (which they expect each greedy minute) it shall then return ten-fold upon them."* His greed becomes his downfall, when he chooses to expose his wrongdoing instead of accommodating his parasite Mosca.

Each 'gull' is already wealthy, but greedy enough to want more. They bring gifts of diamonds, potions, pearls and plates to win favour and become Volpone's heir. Each is trying to outdo each other by giving 'better' gifts.

Jonson also extends greed to other objects of human desire, including the flesh. Volpone himself states, *"What a rare punishment is avarice to itself?"* Mosca plants the seed of Volpone lying with Corvino's wife and manipulates Corvino into providing her. He describes Celia as *"Bright as your gold! And lovely as your gold;"* as though Celia is something to be acquired and used.

Mosca himself becomes greedy. At the beginning of the play he is content as Volpone's servant, planning and manipulating the situations. However, when Volpone makes him the heir, Mosca enjoys having money, *"I have the keys, and am possessed, since he will needs be dead afore his time, I'll bury him, or gain by him – I am his heir, and so will keep me, till her share at least."*

Greed ends up making everyone look foolish, contemptible and poorer, both spiritually and financially and they are each punished in court. The play lets the audience know what greed's real consequences are.

SICKNESS/ILLNESS & DEATH

Volpone emphasises disease and physical degeneration with Johnson producing images of withering, rotting and physical decay. He shows old, dying, ageing, unhealthy, lusty men and women. Celia also comments on this theme, imaging the terrible disfigurements, leprosies and flayings which she would endure rather than yield to Volpone's lust.

Other images of this theme include Volpone pretending to be dying; the physical deterioration of Corbaccio as he ages through the play and Volpone's pain when all of his money goes to the incurables.

One of the questions to ask throughout the play is; *"Is greed an illness?"*

DECEPTION

"The instrument of deception is the creation of illusions, through the stimulating of the imagination." - Hibbard.

All of Jonson's plays between 1603 and 1616 are concerned with deception and characters fell into two groups: Deceivers and Deceived. Johnson ensures that any character that deceives another is ultimately

punished. Bonario and Celia who never engage in deception and are honest are the only ones exempt from punishment.

Deception is created many ways; lying, theatrically and in the form of disguise, and often reveals the truth. Volpone deceives others by showing a rotting, stinking man on the edge of death, but when he becomes Scoto Mantua he reveals part of Volpone's 'true self' – being a healthy, authoritative, amusing and manipulating person. As the court officer, he enjoys his manipulation and gloats over his achievements.

Volpone also recruits his servants, disguising them as doctors and Mosca puts on a disguise when Volpone makes him his 'pretend' heir. This disguise consumes Mosca and almost takes over his real identity and begins his downfall.

Volpone and Mosca also put on a display of theatrics throughout the show. At first Volpone feigns illness to hook the 'gulls' into giving gifts, then later at court they try to convince the judge of their innocence. They use rhetoric to tell a story, complete with 'surprise witness' Lady Would-Be and the imagery of the terminal Volpone.

As the deceived, the 'gulls' only see what they want to see and deliberately refuse to see the truth, so they lie to keep the deception. Voltore lies in court to keep favour with Volpone and when his deception is revealed he faints, declaring that the devil is within him. Corbaccio disinherits his son and then disowns him in court, believing that his own son would kill him rather than listen to him. Corvino is at first a jealous husband, but is quick to force Celia to lie with Volpone. Again instead of listening to his wife, he disowns her and paints her as a whore for the courts. Despite their fears and suspicions of one another, the 'gulls' band together to support the lie that helps them trust and preserve the illusion that they, alone, are about to inherit Volpone's estate. Volpone tells Mosca;

*They will not see't
Too much light blinds them. I think.
Each of them is so possest and stuft with his own hopes,
That anything, unto the contrary
Never so true, or never so apparent,
Never so palpable, they will resist it.*

There is also the issue of artifice - clever or cunning devices - used to trick or deceive others. Corbaccio brings a medicine to Volpone who questions its validity, Scoto Mantua markets a potion, which he claims can cure all ailments and Lady Would-be ceaselessly, gabbles on about philosophy to which she has little understanding.

COMPROMISING VALUES

Each of the 'gulls' compromise their own values for money; Corbaccio disinherits his son, before disowning him; a jealous Corvino pimps out his wife and the upright Voltore lies in court. They each compromise something that is sacred to him, with no return.

Lady Would-be is also willing to compromise her married status, as Mosca reminds her; *"Remember what your ladyship offered me/to put you in as heir."*

CLASS

Mosca is Volpone's servant and has been with him a long time. There is no question that he could inherit his master's money, but when he has the opportunity, Mosca becomes greedy and plots to keep half the money. None of the 'gulls' appreciate Mosca's manipulative and persuasive traits, easily blinded by his status of being a servant, so they are easily led.

Even though Mosca follows his master's plan and out-wits his master, Mosca is given the harshest penalty of all, condemned to the galleys for passing himself off as a 'person of breeding.'



Symbols

ANIMAL IMAGERY

There is a 'fable' running throughout the play and the characters are characterised by their namesake animals, revealing the motivations of each person. The tale tells of a cunning 'Fox' (Volpone in Italian), circled by a mischievous 'fly' (Mosca), who helps the Fox trick several birds (Gulls) – a vulture (Voltore), a crow (Corvino) and a raven (Corbaccio) into losing their feathers or in this case, wealth. Lady Would-Be is also likened to a parrot as she chatters endlessly in the manner of a parrot.

They 'gulls' are not merely fools, but money-hungry, lustful and morally despicable. Their names suggest their depravity and they are described as 'gulls' because of how seagulls crowd around for a feed. The term 'gulling' means making someone into a fool.

Volpone's scam depends on Mosca's ability to leech his clients, but this is followed by Corvino, Corbaccio and Voltore's desire to leech Volpone. These characters aren't honest and are willing to use any means to secure Volpone's fortune. They are all parasites, flies and birds competing over Volpone's dying carcass. Jonson's characters are human in shape, but beasts in their behaviour.

Volpone himself is named after the fox. In Aesop's tales, the fox always seems more compelling and more human than his victim. The emblem of the fox, *"Stretch'd on the earth, with fine delusive sleights, mocking a gaping crow,"* lies at the heart of the play. The 'fox' may not be very nice, but given the choice, no one would identify with the crow, in this case the 'gulls'.

Mosca the fly is also marked by his name from the insect that clusters about the deathbed of the Fox. Yet flies, like birds, are winged creatures, generically different from mammals. It is interesting that he out-foxes Volpone, who confesses rather than let his parasite take anything from him.

Only Celia and Bonario escape animal imagery; but are morally typed by their names; Celia meaning heavenly and Bonario meaning good-natured.



VENICE

Jonson's plays were often in metropolitan settings with no references made to the beauty of nature surrounding the plot. When Jonson wrote *Volpone*, Venice was the seat of greed, corruption, and decadence, according to many years of literary stereotypes in English drama. Venice was the centre of trade and had a reputation for public and strict administration of justice. It was also a place of luxury and well organised, high-class prostitution.

To the English, Italians were seen as sensuous, decadent beings, thanks to their sophisticated culture, history of dubious politicians and beautiful

poetry of love. This lack of cultural understanding made the English wary of being infected with immorality, and Venetians were seen as the worst of the bunch.

Jonson warns in *Volpone*, that Londoners wishing for Venice's sophistication may end up with Venice's degradation as well.

MOUNTEBANK

Volpone disguises himself as a mountebank. A mountebank is described as someone who deceives others, especially in order to trick them out of money. They can be described as; a charlatan, swindler, trickster, fraudster, hoaxer, villain and scoundrel.

When Volpone dresses up as the mountebank, Scoto Mantua, he talks people into giving money with the promise of good health contained in his medicine.

Set Designer

JONATHON OXLADE

Jonathon studied Illustration and Sculpture at the Queensland College of Art.

Jonathon has designed set and costumes for Windmill Theatre, The Queensland Theatre Company, Is This Yours?, Aphids, Circa, Arena Theatre Company, Polyglot, Bell Shakespeare, Polytoxic, Men Of Steel, The Real TV Project, Terrapin Puppet Theatre, The Escapists, The Border Project, State Theatre of South Australia, LaBoite Theatre. Venues and Festivals including the Sydney Opera House, Melbourne Festival, Adelaide Festival and Fringe, The Malthouse, Performance Space and the Queensland Art Gallery. Jonathon has illustrated the Picture Book *The Empty City* for Hachette Livre/Lothian, *The Edie Amelia* series by Sophie Lee, was Festival Designer for the 2010 *Out Of The Box* festival and is currently the Resident Designer at Windmill Theatre.



He received 2005 Matilda Awards; Best Designer for *A Christmas Carol* and Contribution to Queensland Theatre, and 2009 Matilda Award; Best Designer for *Attack of the Attacking Attackers*. 2010 Greenroom Award nominated for *Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mud* for Best Design, 2011 Ruby Award for *School Dance*. Jonathon was nominated for a 2013 and 2014 Helpmann award, 'Best Scenic Design' for *School Dance* and *Pinocchio* along with a Greenroom nomination for *Skeleton* and *I Heart John McEnroe*.

Jonathon was awarded the 'Lord Mayors Fellowship Grant' to attend the Prague Quadrennial of Scenography and Theatre Architecture.

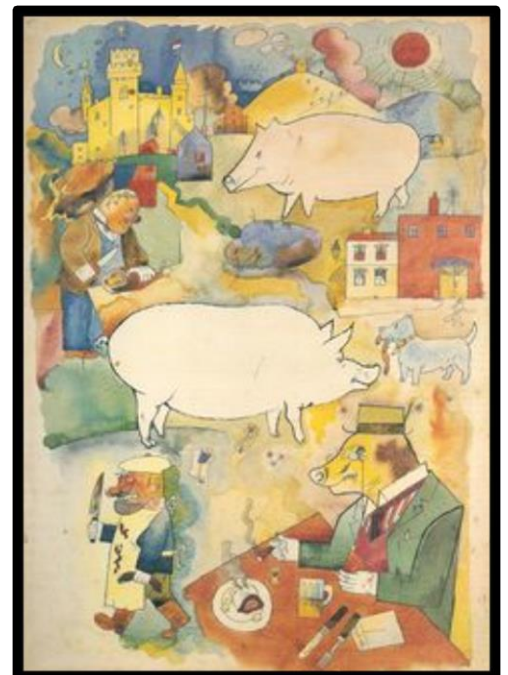
INTERVIEW WITH DESIGNER

1. What is the initial concept that Nescha gave you for the set?

Nescha and I loved the themes and ideas in the play around degradation of opulence, the privileged class inevitably decaying, no matter how much wealth and beauty they can afford. We took this idea further with our set and costumes, hopefully it feels a bit like everything is breaking down or on its way to becoming so. It should all feel a bit grotesque.

2. What is your starting point for creating a new world?

We started with gathering reference images; we looked at the Illustrations of George Grosz, who is a mid-20th century artist who commented on the post war period in Berlin Germany. His work pictures the various class systems and bourgeoisie in Germany. We also looked at classical Venetian architecture, which is filled with arches and plaza like structures. We based our set on these references. We looked at Wes Anderson films, Monty Python characters, Terry Gilliam animations, the list goes on. We slowly look for things that remind us of what we are trying to create, collect them, and then synthesise them into something new. A new unique look.





3. How important are the original stage directions of the play in your process?

The original stage directions give the adaption writer a clue to what the original play was doing. Emily has written another version of the play for this season. Some of the stage directions are there, but not many. In this case they were not that useful to us. We are presenting a new, fresh version of *Volpone*.

4. Why are the themes of the play important when designing the set and costumes? And how do you try to incorporate them into the design?

The themes are what makes the story interesting. It's very important to hint at them when making developing a design that is so illustrative. They are what lets us know what a character looks like, or where they live etc. Also, the themes let us know about what the tone of the play is. In this case, it's a satire that highlights the grotesqueness and greed of the upper middle class when concerned with their growing wealth.

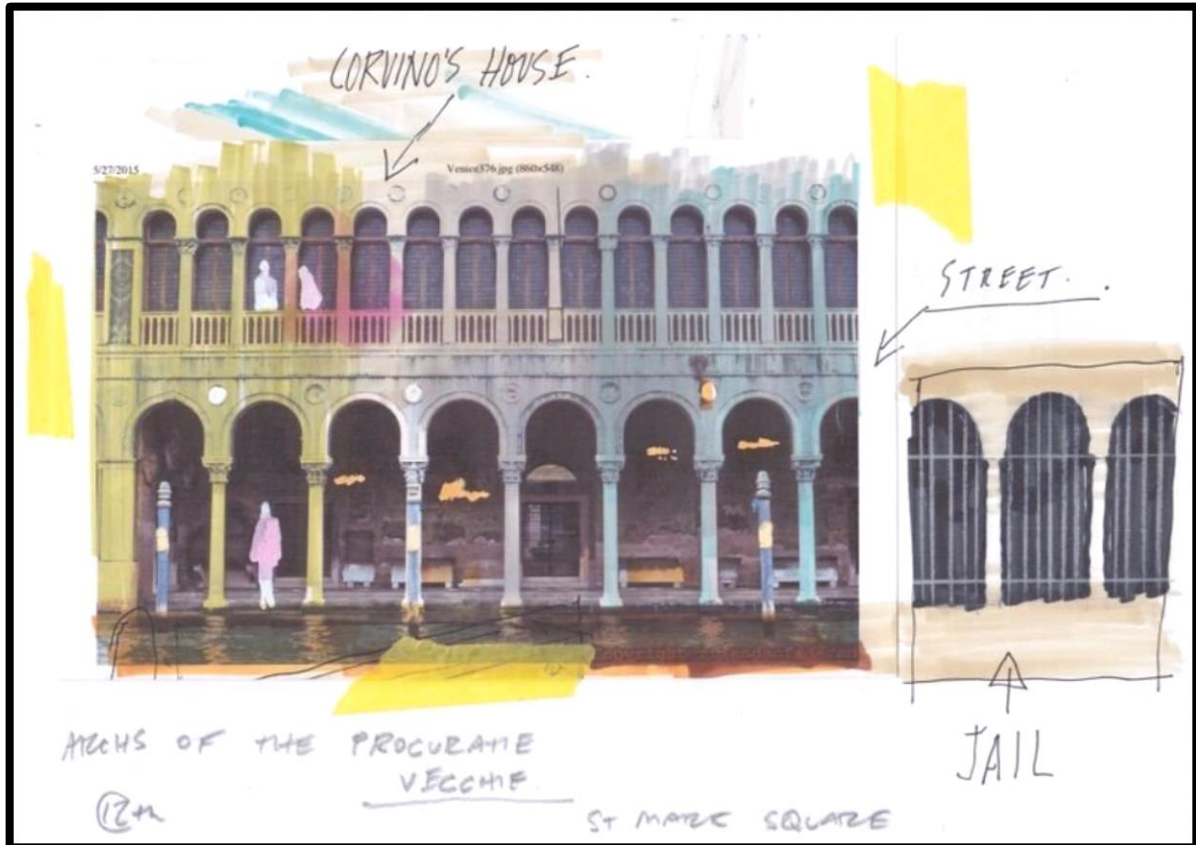
(George Grosz - www.itsnicethat.com/articles/george-grosz-berlin)

5. At the design briefing you talked about evolving the costumes. What does this mean and why is this important?

As a designer you can't answer everything. On the first day of rehearsals, actors and directors need to start developing characters together; so my costumes designs are more a guide, allowing the actors time to evolve their characters' 'look' along the way. Hopefully they are close to what the director and I have put down on the paper, but giving the actors the opportunity to 'grow' their characters helps everyone in the long run. This is only in the case of characters that do not require lots of work to realise. Wardrobe need to know what they are making after all!

Set & Costume Design

"We are never allowed to forget for long the dirt, the squalor and the mess of which human life is so largely made up." - Hibbard



SET

Although the play has been adapted and updated; it is set in no given era. The play references Venice, but with the tackiness and greed of Venice Beach - an invented world where everything is not as it seems. The world feels big and societal; a world of officers, courtrooms, judges, lawyers, rich men, poor men, con men, trophy wives, fake medicine and big money.

Ben Johnson would often set his plays in ugly, urban, dirty settings with no references to the environment around them. Despite *Volpone* being set in Venice, there is no reference to the picturesque canals or grand buildings.

With the design, director Nescha Jelk wanted to embrace the expanse of the corrupt city landscape, creating a big, dirty, corrupt city with superficial values and a high level of artifice.

While the set looks elaborate with two levels, at the edges it is dilapidated, soiled and degraded, clearly referencing the grotesqueness of the greed in the play. The upper level/balcony is part of Corvino's house and where Celia drops her handkerchief from, but also a place where conversations can be overheard. These two playing spaces help to make the set look grand.

The use of the stage apron opens up the front to the audience, inviting them into this world. The arches are spatially based on the Palazzo in Venice. These archways become entrances, exits, places to hide, and prison cells.

We begin in Volpone's house, which is like a museum of different eras and tastes, with a green wall where his artwork hangs. His house is opulent, but vulgar. This back wall of his house is removed and the rest of the action takes place in front of and around the archways.

The whole look is created by a ply finish, creating a 2D film set look. Everything seems to be rotting, is water stained, filthy and sick. The colours in the set are muted, wet, tired and feel as though life has been sucked out.

COSTUMES

Volpone - is often in his nightie and at one points reveals his underwear, which is all very theatrical and vulgar. As Scoto Mantua, he is a hybrid of a medicinal man or guru - not a doctor of anything and his costume is elaborate. He also wears a different disguise as the 'female' court officer, wearing a woman's suit, complete with skirt.

Voltore - is a lawyer. He is super sleek and been given a heightened villain look, complete with eye patch. He is well presented in a dark suit and unlike the other characters, doesn't wear grotesqueness on his sleeve. He is polished, poised, slimy - think car salesman, or the villain in Austin Powers

Corvino - is like a man who hasn't grown up. He is preppy, cashed up and plays golf, often wearing spiked golf shoes and lunch is always on his clothes. His costume reflects his money, low self-esteem and his immaturity.



Corbaccio - Is older than Volpone, but dresses like a 30 year old, who has had plastic surgery to stay young. He has been a celebrity in his younger years and he is holding onto this ideal. He is trying to fill the 'hole' in his life left by his vanity, so he wears a velour tracksuit, gold stick and glasses, and then gets a gold rimmed wheelchair - referenced to the musical entertainer, 'Liberace.'

Mosca - is the servant and of a lower class. He looks unwashed and wears a bell-hop uniform confirming his status. There are other servants in uniform too, who are essentially part of the furniture - they help Volpone with his scams, dressing up as doctors, etc.

Lady Would-be

Is the wife of Sir Politic, is English and wealthy. She is incredibly vain and is portrayed similarly to 'real housewives' complete with lots of plastic surgery and designer clothing. She may have money, but she has no style.

Bonario – is a young man who tries to save Celia and be the hero. He has a preppy style, but loses himself a little after a night in prison.

Celia - is young and beautiful, tough and intelligent, and is viewed as innocent and conservative in her dress. However, she loses some of her innocence after a night in jail.

Judge – think Bronwyn Bishop meets Judge Judy inside a stately court room. Money and celebrity has affected the courtroom. She wears a power suit and has a Bronwyn Bishop style hairdo.

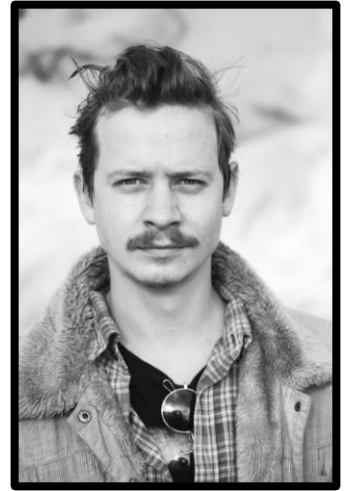


Music

WILL SPARTALIS - Sound & Music Designer

Will Spartalis is an Adelaide based composer, sound designer, animator and film-maker, also working in Production at the Adelaide Festival Centre and as a core crew member with the Adelaide Fringe Festival.

This is Will's second production for State Theatre Company. He was the sound designer for our 2013 production of *Jesikah*, also directed by Nescha Jelk. Working in the local and international film, music, theatre and advertising industries for the last ten years, Will has been nominated for 'Best Composition' at the South Australian Screen Awards for his work on the political docudrama *The Martyr* (Anomaly Media), and his collaborative short film series *Italian Spiderman* (Alrugo Productions) has to date amassed over 6 million views online, worldwide. In 2014, he was commissioned by Urban Myth Theatre Co to compose music and create audio-visuals for a major Anzac Day event at Adelaide Oval.



Along with producing his own music, Will creates animated sequences for digital online content and is currently in post-production for his next film project entitled *The Man with the Magic Eye* with his film team GALACTALUX, in which he acts as lead writer, project manager, composer and sound designer.

MUSIC

The music is designed to follow the mood of the character, Volpone. It will help create mood when he is sick, before instantly picking up when he jumps up. The music will also help create the grandeur and theatricality for the character of Scoto Mantua.

The rest of the time the music will be background music, with a cross between a Wurlitzer and a Hammond organ, sounding alright, but with a feeling that it is a little bit wrong.

There are some songs written into the script that Volpone sings. The songs are all light in tone, highlighting the trickery of the play. Music is used for Scoto Mantua to sell his medicinal oil, and Volpone's song to Celia describes the life of pleasure he envisions for them. The absence of songs after Volpone's attempted rape of Celia depicts the change in attitude of the play, becoming harsher towards Volpone.

Volpone as Scoto Mantua sings this song about his potion:

*Would you be ever fair and young?
Stout of teeth, and strong of tongue?
Tart of palate? Quick of ear?
Sharp of sight? Of nostril clear?
Moist of hand? And light of foot?
Or, I will come nearer to't,
Would you live free from all diseases?
Do the act your lover pleases!
Yet fright all aches from your bones?
Here's a med'cine, for eight crowns.*

Volpone tries to woo Celia with a song;

*While we can, the sports of love,
Time will not be ours for ever,
He, at length, our good will sever;
Why should we defer our joys?
Fame and rumour are but toys.
Tis no sin love's fruits to steal -
But the sweet thefts to reveal.
Cannot we delude the eyes
Of a few poor household spies?
That the curious shall not know
How to tell them as they flow*

INTERVIEW WITH WILL

1. What was the starting point to begin designing sound for this play?

To begin any design, I like to develop a 'character' for the sound and music itself - almost a personality of sorts from which to design everything from. By imagining the sound as a character itself, I can ask the same questions of my work that each actor asks; What is the character's motivation? How do they see the world they inhabit? What sort of rhythms and moods do they have and how do they express them? Answering these questions allows me to build the music in a way that always ties back to the text and tone of the show itself. In *Volpone*, the title character is manipulating almost everything we see and hear, so the characterisation of the sound design has become Volpone himself! All music and sound within the play is thus intended to appear almost as if he himself wrote it, as a way of embellishing upon and enhancing his own tastelessly sneaky scheme.

2. How much does the set and costume design influence what you do?

They influence my work immensely, as first and foremost, what I do is all about aesthetic cohesion; I want the music, sound, set and costume design to feel very much a part of the same world and borne of the same universe, so that the audience can best feel immersed in the experience we're creating for them. In *Volpone*, the costume design has deeply influenced the specific tones and sounds I'm working with so that I can best accentuate the soiled, exaggerated and slightly grotesque glamour of this world, which is why the score is almost entirely created around old Wurlitzer and Hammond organ sounds. Desperately classy, but a little dingy too.

The set has also heavily influenced the rhythms of the music, as I've worked to capture the rhythmic visual 'bounce' of the Venetian arches running across the stage. Really, I've aimed to represent how this architecture would SOUND if it were to make its own music!

3. What musical references have you made in your design?

As so much of the tone of the show is about foolhardy pretending, deceit and the shallow, adorned lives of the seemingly cultural elite, the music makes quite overt references to the rash of "Hooked On Hammond" records put out during the 50s, 60s and 70s, which covered contemporary pop hits on old organs that are mostly found these days in Op Shops and your great uncle's sitting room. There are also minor references to the work of Mark Mothersbaugh's work with Wes Anderson, John Swihart's work on the film *Napoleon Dynamite* and Luciano Michelini's 'Frolic,' which many people would recognise as the theme song to the TV series *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. All of these represent a playful, comedic silliness that is such an important element in *Volpone*.

4. How do you work with the director?

My work with any director always starts with coffee. Nescha and I sit down over multiple cups of coffee and work through all the themes, concepts, characters and tones of the text in order to see how sound and music can best accent and enhance everything else going on, creating the world of *Volpone*. In her

role as director, Nescha is constantly throwing ideas at me throughout the production process and asking me how I might utilise sound and music to accentuate a given moment or idea, trusting me to make the creative decisions necessary, then discusses the results in depth so that we both know we're on the right track. Sometimes an element of the show will change slightly during the rehearsal phase, which will slightly redirect what I do, while other times an idea I have will subtly inform Nescha's direction of an element. It's very back and forth, give and take, with both of us influencing each other's ideas and being honest and direct when something either does or doesn't work. That way we're both supporting each other's creative impulses and finding the 'truth' of the show itself.

5. You are working with Paul (Volpone) to create his songs, how does this collaboration work and why is this important in your creative process?

Paul is an incredibly talented and prolific performer, so his creative instincts are extremely sharp and productive. Bouncing ideas between the two of us is the most productive and fun way to create Volpone's songs so that they're drawing from both our unique skill-sets and feel completely 'right' for the character. We've hunkered down with the script and he has sung his ideas, while I've played my own on the piano. This process allows us to mix and match our different thoughts and see where we line up naturally; it's actually tremendously fun. This sort of collaboration is so enjoyable and important, as it enables me to see ideas from more perspectives than just my own, which elevates my work and constantly suggests directions I can take things that I mightn't have otherwise considered. Every production should be a creative challenge in some way, so collaboration is a way of continually learning and growing my craft.

Interesting Reading

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

Jonson was influenced by European theatre, particularly the Italian 'Commedia dell'arte.' Many of the characters in *Volpone* come from the commedia tradition. A lawyer, an elderly gent, and a possessive husband, whom Jonson names after birds of prey, while they themselves are preyed on.

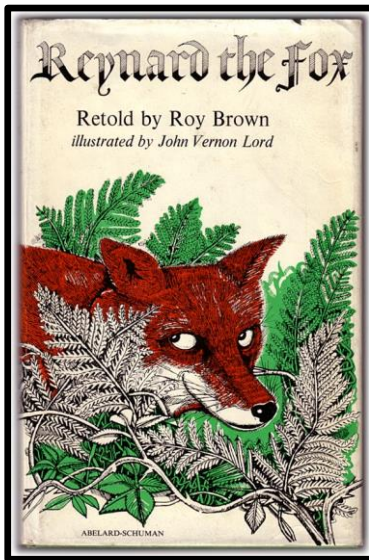
Commedia dell'arte translates as "*comedy of skills*": an improvisational style of theatre which began in sixteenth-century Italy and flourished in Europe for 200 years.

Traveling companies performed outdoors in public squares, using simple backdrops and props. Each member of the company played a particular stock character, wearing masks and costumes that defined the character's personality. They worked from a basic outline, improvising the dialogue and comedy. The performers always played the same characters, changing only their situations. The great silent movie comedians; Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd, drew on the acrobatic physical comedy of commedia in their films. The stock characters of Commedia dell'arte live on in modern sitcom characters (such as the lovable but dumb husband, the know-it-all next door neighbour, and the wisecracking best friend) who deal with changing situations each week.

Johnson imbedded some of Commedia dell'arte's characteristics in *Volpone*. Many of the characters' verbal and physical routines are embedded in stock Commedia characters. Corbaccio's deafness and shuffling walking and Corvino's jealous rages are an example. Instead of wearing masks in the Commedia tradition, *Volpone's* characters are likened to animals.

The character of Pantalone was a caricature of the Venetian merchant, "*A wealthy, miserly old man, usually lecherous.*" Often the character of Pantalone had a young wife or daughter. This describes several of the characters; Volpone who is a rich and lecherous man; Corbaccio, who is willing to disinherit his son for money; or Corvino who calls himself 'Pantalone di Besogniosi', who is willing to whore out his wife for money.

The traditional character of Dottore, "*a smug, know-it-all professor, who really knows nothing;*" describes the character of the pedantic lawyer, Voltore, who is pompously grandiose in the court room. The Harlequin character is the trickster who often woos a love interest, with a traditional costume including a fox-tail. This can describe Volpone, including his obsession with Celia. This character is often followed by a zany or comic servant, whose competitive imitations of his master escalate into a race for victory, such as Mosca's actions throughout the play.



FABLES – THE FOX

Aesop wrote many fables giving animals human characteristics to impart moral lessons.

The fox is known as a cunning animal and is an obvious choice to embody the traits of a conman. By the thirteenth century, two French manuscripts depicted a fox who routinely flouted the law and authority. This was called, Reynard. Reynard fools other people for his benefit; he assaults a rabbit with a broom; jousts with his lifelong enemy; he robs animals of their food and possessions; tricks a rooster into pulling a cart so he doesn't have to walk; tricks a sheep into standing at the bottom of the well so he can escape; he even wrestles the lion, king of beasts.

The premises of the stories are; that Reynard dupes another animal into harming itself, either for Reynard's benefit or amusement. The animal only realizes later that it has been wronged. Sometimes they appear before the king for a trial and Reynard worms his way out of trouble, showing the king a hidden treasure or tricking the king.

Jonson's work in *Volpone* works on this central image using Volpone (a fox) to feign death to lure birds of prey, (Voltore, Corvino & Corbaccio) close to his mouth. Mosca (fly) is also based on Aesop's characters. There are three Aesop's tales that are similar, *The Fox with a Swollen Stomach*, *The Fox and the Huge Serpent*, and *The Flies*. In these stories the Fox or the Fly gorge themselves and are undone by their inability to moderate their appetites; similar to the greed of Volpone and Mosca.

The stories of Reynard and *Volpone* intersect; Reynard's trial/the court proceedings against Volpone; Reynard feigning death/Volpone's fake sickness; Reynard's disguise as a doctor/Volpone's disguise as the mountebank; Reynard as a musician/ Volpone singing to Celia.

Jonson's satiric comedy holds up a mirror to people's worst flaws and reflects them in exaggerated form. The greed and lust of the play reduces the character to parodies of their better selves and the more foolish their actions, the more beastly they become.

POEM –EPODE

An excerpt from EPODE by Ben Johnson

*NOT to know vice at all, and keep true state,
Is virtue, and not fate:
Next to that virtue is to know vice well,
And her black spite expel.
Which to effect (since no breast is so sure,
Or safe, but she'll procure
Some way of entrance) we must plant a guard
Of thoughts to watch and ward
At th' eye and ear, the ports unto the mind,
That no strange or unkind
Object arrive there, but the heart, our spy,
Give knowledge instantly
To wakeful reason, our affections' king:
Who, in th' examining,
Will quickly taste the treason, and commit
Close, the close cause of it.*

*'Tis the securest policy we have,
To make our sense our slave.
But this true course is not embraced by many:
By many? scarce by any.
For either our affections do rebel,
Or else the sentinel,
That should ring alarm to the heart, doth sleep:
Or some great thought doth keep
Back the intelligence, and falsely swears
They're base and idle fears
Whereof the loyal conscience so complains.
Thus, by these subtle trains,
Do several passions invade the mind,
And strike our reason blind.*

<http://www.bartleby.com/331/456.html>

Debate

"Does money make you mean" – Discuss

Then watch Paul Piff's TED talk;

http://www.ted.com/talks/paul_piff_does_money_make_you_mean?language=en

Essay Questions

ENGLISH QUESTIONS

1. Compare Jonson's style of writing with Shakespeare. What are the similarities and the differences?
2. "*Disguises reveal more truth than they conceal.*" Discuss
3. Jonson uses animal imagery in the play for his main characters. Describe the detail of each character and how it relates to the main plot.
4. Read Jonson's poem 'Epode' and discuss how this relates to the themes in *Volpone*.
5. Think about the characters of Voltore, Corbaccio and Corvino. What is the wealth compensating for in their lives? Discuss.
6. Discuss the division of class in relation to Mosca and the other characters in the play.
7. Discuss the fear of death and mortality as presented in the play.
8. What does the character Lady Would-Be do for the play?
9. Read the original version of *Volpone* with the characters of Sir Politic and Peregrine. What is the sub-plot surrounding them and why do you think it was left out of this version of the play?

DRAMA QUESTIONS

1. The music follows the character of *Volpone*. Discuss
2. Analyse the use of songs in *Volpone*. What purposes do they serve in the play?
3. Discuss the style of Commedia Dell-arte and how it relates to the play *Volpone*.
4. Discuss how the theme of greed is represented in the set and costume designs.
5. Describe the character of Scoto Mantua and how this reveals *Volpone*'s real character.
6. Research Elizabethan theatre and how they were staged. How different/similar is the setting of this production of *Volpone*?
7. Describe the comedy in *Volpone*.

DESIGN

Design your own set for *Volpone* discussing the reason for the choices that you've made.

OR

Design the costumes for the main characters in *Volpone*.

	production elements	performance elements
strengths		
impact on audiences		
weaknesses		

design role	technique	What did this contribute to the performance?
lighting	<i>one</i>	
	<i>two</i>	
	<i>three</i>	
music	<i>one</i>	
	<i>two</i>	
	<i>three</i>	

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