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Power turned inside out

Schlosstheater Schönbrunn, 22.10.2026 [ENA]

What happens when the appetite for power becomes the only principle of government? In Alfred Jarry's "King Ubu," ambition is stripped of dignity, authority of legitimacy, and violence of its convenient excuses. Julian Rohrmoser's diploma production, featuring students of the Institute of Acting and Directing, approaches this anarchic play as a disturbing reflection of a world increasingly accustomed to the grotesque. At Schlosstheater Schönbrunn, its questions promise to resonate beyond the stage.

The story follows Father Ubu and Mother Ubu as they overthrow the established order in pursuit of wealth and absolute control. Yet the seizure of power is not the culmination of their desires. It merely creates the conditions for further excess. Greed generates repression; repression generates conflict; conflict leaves devastation behind. What begins as an outrageous struggle for advantage develops into a parable about the destruction of any shared political or moral ground.

Rohrmoser's stated approach draws attention to the normalisation of narcissistic tyrants, an overwhelmed society, and the sensation that reality itself has become distorted. The relevance lies less in identifying a single contemporary counterpart for Ubu than in examining the habits that allow such figures to flourish. How does the unacceptable become familiar? When does laughter expose brutality, and when does it help an audience tolerate it?

For a student ensemble, these questions offer a demanding artistic challenge. Ubu cannot simply be played as a monster safely separated from ordinary life. His appetite must remain recognisable even at its most excessive. Mother Ubu, likewise, calls for more than the familiar outline of a scheming accomplice. Their relationship opens a space for investigating persuasion, dependency, complicity, and the mutually reinforcing fantasies through which power justifies itself.

From the perspective of actor training, the material invites precision rather than indiscriminate exaggeration. Grotesque theatre loses its force when every gesture arrives at the same volume. Its sharper possibilities emerge through contrast: a moment of apparent reason beside an act of cruelty, a persuasive phrase beside an absurd demand, a comic rhythm interrupted by the consequences of violence. The challenge is to make excess articulate, not merely loud.

The production's setting adds another suggestive dimension. A play about the predatory possession of

Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
Email: contact@european-news-agency.com
Internet: european-news-agency.com

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power, presented at Schlosstheater Schönbrunn, invites audiences to consider the relationship between authority and its theatrical surroundings. Without requiring any particular staging concept, the location provides a frame in which the display of power and the dismantling of its pretensions can enter into productive tension.

As a diploma project, the undertaking also has significance beyond an individual directorial statement. It places emerging performers and a graduating director in dialogue with a text that resists comfortable answers. The educational value resides in that resistance: learning how to sustain an ensemble, shape difficult tonal transitions, and make a political argument through theatrical action rather than explanatory commentary. These are ambitions worth attending to in their own right.

Ultimately, the promise of Rohrmoser's "King Ubu" is not that it will tell audiences which contemporary leaders to recognise. It is that it may sharpen their recognition of the mechanisms beneath the spectacle: appetite masquerading as entitlement, destruction presented as renewal, and collective exhaustion mistaken for consent. The evening's central word is power, but its deeper concern is responsibility. Who exercises it, who enables it, and who bears its costs? For audiences willing to encounter comedy without the reassurance of innocence, this student production offers a compelling invitation: to look at a world turned upside down and ask how much of its distortion has already begun to feel normal.

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Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
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