

Swan Theatre Company – November 2026

Accidental Death of An Anarchist, by Dario Fo and Franca Rame,
A New Adaptation by Tom Basden.

Director: Laura Parker. This will be a verbal and physical spectacle!

Synopsis: An irrepressible fraudster known only as the Maniac is brought into Police Headquarters just as the officers are preparing for a judicial review of the recent ‘accidental’ death of a suspect in custody.

Outwitting the captors, the Maniac dupes them into performing a farcical recreation of the incident, exposing the absurd corruption and terrifying idiocy at the heart of the system.

Tom Basden’s acclaimed adaptation was performed in 2022. It is a wickedly funny, bang-up to date English version, packed with contemporary references. Among the zingers are weightier concerns about undercover police work and corruption.

CHARACTERS

1. MANIAC/JUDGE RANDALL/CAPTAIN MARK POPPINS/ RIGHT REVEREND GREGORY GOOSEY – *an unnamed, compulsive performer, the only character able to see the audience. Also becomes 3 other characters and enjoys disguises. Later wears a wooden hand, a hook, and has a metal leg/foot! **M or F** Must be charismatically clever.*
2. INSPECTOR BURTON – *from the third floor. **M** appears in Act 1, Sc 1, then appears on page 73 almost permanently bewildered, a touch of the John Cleese?*
3. SUPERINTENDENT ANDY CURRY – *the station chief. **M** Authoritarian and brutal, angry and cold. Did we say brutal?*
4. DETECTIVE DAN DAISY – *a plain-clothes detective. **M** a Danny Dyer type*
5. PC JACKSON/FI PHELAN – *Jackson is from the third floor, a rare female officer. Fi is a journalist, seemingly more concerned with her appearance **F** integral to the physical clowning.*
6. JOSEPH – *Agent Joseph, a uniformed officer, the superintendent’s aide. **M** a “simple” foil to the other officers.*

STRUCTURE

Act One, Scene One – pg 8 – 21 A very normal-looking room in a police station. Third Floor.

Scene Two – pg 22 -50 Another normal-looking room – now the Fourth Floor. INTERVAL

Act Two, Scene One – pg 51 – 95 Same room, a little time later.

AUDITION: THE MANIAC – this needs to be off-script. The Maniac has a huge amount of lines, and must be able to present them with vocal variation of volume, tone, accent, and to comic effect.

From outside the door, stage left.

Hello? Inspector Burton? I don't mean to be a pain but, in my rather hasty exit, I appear to have left all of my props. Inspector? Don't sulk. I'm sorry too. I hate it when we fight like this. Inspector?

The MANIAC opens the door, And peers inside.

Mm. No one at the inn. I'll just take the liberty of taking my Liberty bag.

He picks it up. And starts taking papers from the desk.

And my medical records. And my tiny play. And the rest, as they say, is silence. Or, well, actually, let's have a quick squizz at these charge sheets... while I'm here...

The MANIAC picks up some other folders on the desk. While he does so he walks over to the window and opens it.

Ooh! 'Glueing yourself to the A4' Pffff. That's nothing! Probably just crashed into a Copydex lorry. You're fee, sonny Jim!

Flings the file out of the window. Looks at the next one.

What about you? 'Violent protest on Clapham Common.' What would that be? Head butting a riot police baton while sitting on the floor? Good for you, girl. Case dismissed. Fly my pretties, fly!

He flings lots of files out of the window.

The Phone rings. The MANIAC looks at it. And winces.

Oooh I shouldn't, but I want to. But I shouldn't. But I will.

He walks over to the phone. Stops. And looks at the audience.

If I don't answer it of course, we could all just go to the bar. It's very tempting I must say.
(*Weighing it up*) Ah, what the hell.

He picks up the phone. And immediately assumes another voice.

'Ello 'Ello 'Ello, Inspector Burton's office. To whom am I speaking please? From the fourth floor! Then you must be Detective Window-Straddler himself? I'm star-struck, I really am. Window-Straddler? Well, that's just what Burton calls you down here. Alright, calm down, I know you didn't. I know it was an accident, yes, the inquiry said so.

AUDITION SECTION: the Maniac, Burton and Jackson (F)

The MANIAC bangs his fist on the desk

MANIAC. Order! Someone order me a gin fizz!

BURTON. Stop banging, you bloody loony!

BURTON goes to restrain him. The MANIAC spins round.

MANIAC. Hands off me or I'll bite!

BURTON. And get out of my chair

MANIAC. Make me.

BURTON (to JACKSON). Make him!

JACKSON. He'll bite me.

BURTON. Of course he won't.

MANIAC. I might. I might bite. I am a bit of a biter. I blame the rabies.

BURTON walks over to the door and opens it.

BURTON. Alright, fuck this, you win, get out. I don't need this, you can go.

MANIAC. Oh no please, Inspector, please don't kick me out! Just as we're becoming friends. I beg you...

BURTON. Out! Go on! I've got enough to deal with as it is.

The MANIAC springs up and makes for the desk.

MANIAC. Then let me help! I can be the Watson to your Holmes. I can make people talk! I know how to waterboard! Or wine board! Or cheeseboard! I know how to punch people without leaving a bruise! I'll be a credit to the force. At least give me an application form!

BURTON. Piss off!

BURTON heads for the MANIAC. He jinks away, around the desk to the window.

MANIAC. No please, its dangerous out there. The streets are heaving with electric scooters and bad tattoos and children wielding bread knives! I can't go back, I can't, ... I ... I'll throw myself out the window!

BURTON freezes.

JACCKSON. Oh my God, not another one.

MANIAC. What? What's this? Another what?

BURTON. Nothing. She didn't say anything.

MANIAC. But of course. This is where the poor sod flung himself out of the window! This very police station.

BURTON. It is, yeah, - but it wasn't this window, it was the one on the floor above. And don't get any ideas, you're not jumping. Shut it, Constable.

JACKSON. I didn't say anything.

BURTON. The window.

JACKSON. Yes. Sorry.

SHE does so.

BURTON. Now... get out!

HE grabs the MANIAC by the arm and flings him outside.

MANIAC. Don't touch me, I've got worms! And intimacy issues.

BURTON shuts the door after him. Beat.

BURTON. Jesus Christ. I need a nap.

JACKSON. I'm afraid you've got another diversity and inclusion training session, sir.

BURTON. Oh for... What is it this time?

JACKSON. Unconscious bias, sir

BURTON. Urgh. I don't even know what unconscious bias is and I bloody hate it..

JACKSON. Yes, I think that's sort of how it works.

BURTON wheezes to his feet and leaves by the second door, leaving it open.

JACKSON follows.

AUDITION: SUPERINTENDENT, DI DAN DAISY, CONSTABLE JOSEPH, FI PHELAN

FI PHELAN enters with a broad smile, holding her phone. She has a tote bag slung over her shoulder, with a dark loaf of bread, and a huge bunch of chrysanthemums poking out. JOSEPH follows.

JOSEPH. Fi Phelan, sir.

PHELAN. Hi. Hi, guys. Thanks so much for this. Superintendent Curry?

He goes in for a handshake.

SUPERINTENDENT. Call me Andy. Lovely to meet you.

PHELAN. Okay sure, Mind if I grab a quick selfie?

SUPERINTENDENT. If you grab a quick what now sorry?

She takes a quick selfie with him on her phone.

Oh right, yes, no that's... no problem. I'm so sorry to keep you waiting, by the way. I hope they looked after you downstairs?

PHELAN. I got a cup of very scummy tea, yeah. And the sweaty guy on reception asked if I was feeling alright –

SUPERINTENDENT. Well, that's all part of our new Met inclusion and engagement initiative to build community trust.

PHELAN. Right. Yeah. You could also try hiring people who aren't white men. That might help too.

SUPERINTENDENT. Well we're actually quite a diverse place here, aren't we, Constable?

JOSEPH. Uh.. are we?

SUPERINTENDENT. Just a bit. I'm left-handed for one thing. And we've got a woman on the floor below. Send her up actually –

PHELAN. It's okay. I believe you.

DAISY. And my wife's from Wales, so...

PHELAN looks at him, confused. DAISY points at her bag.

You've just been to the shops.

PHELAN. Oh. No, actually, Peckham farmer's market. I'm addicted to the buckwheat chia bread.

SUPERINTENDENT. Oh no.

PHELAN. In a good way.

SUPERINTENDENT. Oh great. This is Detective Daisy by the way. As you can tell from his... deductive prowess.

DAISY. DI Dan Daisy, hey, how's it going, you smell amazing.

PHELAN. Okay that's creepy.

They shake hands. PHELAN yelps a little.

DIASY. Sorry, I've got a very strong grip.

PHELAN. So I see –

SUPERINTENDENT. Firm grip of the facts!

They laugh

DAISY. Yeah. And I'm into rock climbing.

SUPERINTENDENT. This is Constable uh... it's gone again –

JOSEPH. Joseph. Hi.

AUDITION: MANIAC, DAISY, SUPERINTENDENT, JOSEPH

MANIAC. Here's an old proverb for you: 'The landowner sets his dogs on the peasant, if the peasants complain to the king, the landowner, to make amends, shoots his dogs.' I hope that helps.

DAISY. Not really. Who are we?

MANIAC. The dogs. And sadly, I've been sent by the king.

SUPERINTENDENT. This is a set-up!

MANIAC. And I hope the irony isn't lost on you. I think most people will be very pleased with this outcome.

DAISY. Right, yeah, starting with some of the wankers here!

SUPERINTENDENT. And the press! Imagine the horrid stuff they'll print about us!

DAISY. Oh they'll lap it up. Evil, lying, violent Met scum –

SUPERINTENDENT. I try extremely hard not to be any of those things!

DAISY. The corruption, the cover-ups, the toxic culture –

SUPERINTENDENT. I've never even posted anything on the WhatsApp group!

DAISY. The racism, the misogyny...

SUPERINTENDENT. I actually like Meghan Markle –

DAISY. I can't go to prison!

SUPERINTENDENT. Thirty years of loyal service and this is how they repay me!

DAISY. Look at me, I'm a pretty boy.

SUPERINTENDENT. I only kept doing this bloody job for the pension!

DAISY. They'll tear me a new one in there! What do we do, y'lud? Please!

MANIAC. I don't know! Why are you asking me?

DAISY. You're a judge, you must have some idea –

SUPERINTENDENT. Yes, you have to help us –

DAISY. If you were in this position, what would you do?

MANIAC. If I were in your position...?

SUPERINTENDENT. What would you do?

DAISY. Please!

MANIAC. Well... in your position...

SUPERINTENDENT. Yes?

DAISY. Tell us –

SUPERINTENDENT. Please tell us

The MANIAC opens the window.

MANIAC. I'd throw myself out of the window.

SUPERINTENDENT. Yes! Sorry, what?

MANIAC. You asked for my advice and there I t is.

DDAISY. I don't think I can though –

MANIAC. You don't need to, the raptus will do it for you.

SUPERINTENDENT. Now hang on a sec –

MANIAC. Why give any more of your time and energy to this bastard planet! Take your revenge, headbuttt it from a great height!

SUPERINTENDENT. But surely there's still hope?

The MANIAC begins to guide them towards the window.

MANIAC. Nope. No hope. Abandon all hope ye who enter here. Hope has flown out of the window; if you jump now you can maybe catch it on the way down.

DAISY. No please, anything but that –

MANIAC. Your best years are behind you, I promise, you'll never get a better part than this...

SUPERINTENDENT. Well don't... what are you doing - ?

MANIAC. It's not me, it's the raptus. Hurrah, here comes raptus the liberator, ready to set you free...

The MANIAC guides them up onto the windowsill.

DAISY. No, please... MANIAC. Give in to the raptus!

JOSEPH enters. He hold two mugs.

JOSEPH. One tea and one oat flattie... (*Seeing them on the sill*) Is everything alright?

AUDITION: JOSEPH, SUPERINTENDENT, MANIAC, DAISY

DAISY. It was well sudden, though, y'lud! He slipped right through us like a greased gimp.

JOSEPH. He did, yeah. I only just managed to get him by the foot.

The MANIAC spins and stares at JOSEPH, excited.

MANIAC. Say that again!

The SUPERINTENDENT is suddenly on high alert.

JOSEPH. I... only just managed to get him by the foot

The MANIAC shakes his hand.

MANIAC. Ha! See how my Paxman-esque pedantry bears fruit. You got him by the foot?

JOSEPH. I... think so. Is that... good?

MANIAC. It is.

DAISY. He did then. He definitely did.

JOSEPH. I made a statement about it. The shoe came off in my hand and he carried on falling to the ground –

MANIAC. Aha! The shoe remained!

JOSEPH. I should have got his ankle really –

MANIAC. No matter, the shoe is the thing! The shoe is the irrefutable proof of your ardent efforts to save him.

The MANIAC draws a shoe on the wall.

SUPERINTENDENT. Yes exactly! Terrific work, Constable... what's your name again?

JOSHEPH. Joseph, sir.

SUPERINTENDENT. Well done, Joseph.

JOSEPH. Thank you, sir. I know in that moment I had to act, instinct just took over and –

SUPERINTENDENT. Yes alright, that'll do.