

Kulturkupeen

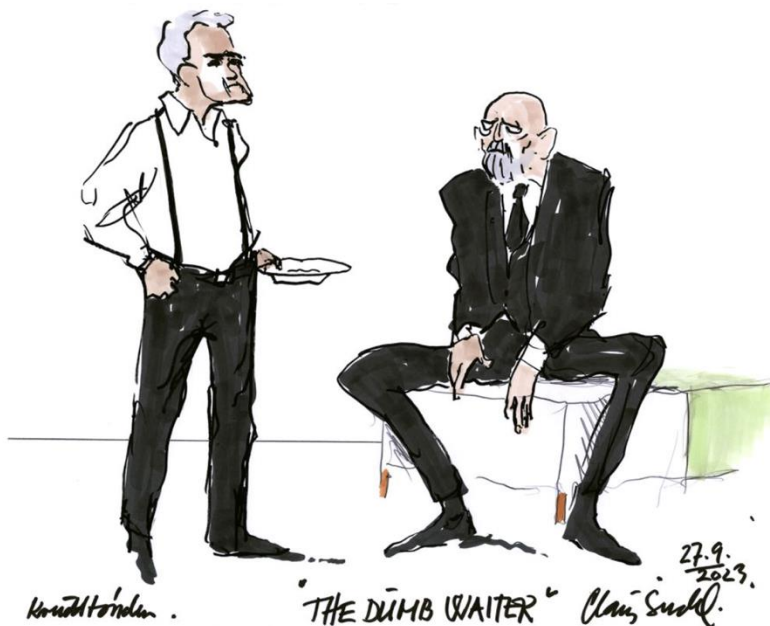


By Ulla Strømberg

The Dumb Waiter by Harold Pinter at That Theatre Company in Østerbro.

"the dumb waiter" is by all a victory for the English-speaking That Theatre Company, which has just celebrated its 25th anniversary. With "The Dumb Waiter", the theatre demonstrates its raison d'être in an exemplary manner: a British neo-classic is played - in a perfect "interpretation" without any modernizations.

"The Dumb Waiter" is a one-act play **and a little classic**, played seemingly 1:1 with no changes and with the finest kind of accuracy in pauses, linguistic phrasing and, last but not least, location. There's not a lot of moving around here, as director Barry McKenna fortunately didn't need to try to, in any way, update the play.



However, the two characters Ben and Gus - played by Lars Mikkelsen in impeccable English that is hard to define in terms of class. Ian Burns, who is also the director and founder of That Theatre, is the slightly more submissive, timid and curious Gus. Of course, he has mastered the language and English technique, and with Lars Mikkelsen by his side, he is for once given a great acting counterpart that shows his strength.

The two mature men complement each other and it's interesting to observe the different playing styles. Ian Burns is British in every way, i.e. there is precision in words as well as movement. Lars Mikkelsen, who rarely appears on a theatre stage these days, has become a genuine actor, where the line between thought, emotion and expression is more fluid. Today, Lars Mikkelsen's voice is superb. Both gentlemen are in total control on stage in the not-so-easy roles.

Because how do you play assassins waiting for their orders?



One of the reasons Harold Pinter's early 1950s drama is considered absurd is because big questions about life are transformed into a nocturnal encounter between two assassins in an almost slapstick style. Actually, it's very similar to what Beckett did to a more extreme degree in his plays such as 'Waiting for Godot' and 'Happy Days', among others.

In "The Dumb Waiter" the room is black, and rarely has Krudttønden been more perfect with its cramped space. This was also the case around 1960 in London and later in Copenhagen in the new small experimental theatres.

Two suit-clad grown men are sitting in a basement waiting for orders "from above". At first, they talk about football and newspaper articles and lack of tea. When the famous kitchen lift starts moving, they get scared and pull out their guns, but they're just "orders". Because the basement was probably once a café kitchen, the two men are used to carrying out orders, so they do their best to fulfil the demands. They give their tea bags, milk and biscuits. But the orders keep coming and they have nothing more to send up. Then another kind of order comes in, 'disaster' strikes and the show is over.



With the ordinary talk and the unfamiliar environment, it's a deeply sophisticated way of showing man's dependence on a hierarchy. By 1957, Pinter was already well on his way as a writer and playwright.

An encounter with such a well-played "The Dumb Waiter" in 2023 in Østerbro is also a bit nostalgic. When I was young in the 1960s, Pinter and Ionesco were favourite playwrights of mine that the students in the second year of secondary school played. It was new, and it was relevant, but also damn difficult to understand.

Understanding has become easier, and now this short play has become a part of theatre history, and has become beautiful, relevant and vibrant theatre.

In Denmark, the play was known as "The Kitchen Elevator". Written by a 27-year-old Harold Pinter, it was first performed in 1959 in Berlin and in 1960 in London after Pinter had great success with his play "Birthday Party". Since then, Pinter has also created excellent scripts for some of the great British films, such as 'The French Lieutenant's Woman'.

Pinter was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005, but in the years before he was considered a socially engaged writer and an interesting British representative of the semi-absurdist theatre that began with Beckett and Ionesco. In a 1961 book by critic Martin Esslin, a handful of writers were once and for all labelled as absurd. Since then, there have been some exciting waves of British theatre - but right now, there seems to be a lull, no waves, no new playwriting talent in England, Germany or France.

"The Dumb Waiter is a shining example of good theatre that has something to say but doesn't need to shout it out. Highly recommended. -

Up to and including 21 October. In Krudttønden on Østerbro.

DIRECTOR Barry McKenna

CAST Lars Mikkelsen og Ian Burns

[www.http://that-theatre.com/](http://that-theatre.com/)

CPHCULTURE



In a time when more and more theatres are including classics in their programmes only to play them beyond recognition, it is a treat for the soul to visit Krudttønden in Østerbro, where That Theatre Company gives a true demonstration of how to play Harold Pinter.

With his one-act play "The Dumb Waiter", Nobel Prize winner Harold Pinter has created an enduring piece of work whose ambiguous English title is only partly justified by the title "The Kitchen Elevator", which is often used in connection with Danish-language productions of the play. This excellent English-language version, which Barry McKenna has staged so sublimely, is also a summit meeting between two of our country's finest actors:

Ian Burns has been spoiling Danes with high-quality English-language theatre for decades via That Theatre Company and previously shone as a Shakespearean actor in "Much Ado About Nothing" at the Botanical Gardens. Now he shows that he also masters the theatre of the absurd in the role of the subdued and increasingly frustrated hitman Gus, who, along with his partner Ben, sits in a dreary basement room waiting for orders from above.

When Gus finally finds himself with his back against the wall, he does so with a desperation in his eyes that not only relates to the specific situation he finds himself in, but also takes on an existential character that touches us all thanks to Ian Burns' performance.

As his co-star and co-star, Lars Mikkelsen makes a welcome artistic comeback to the stage as the only seemingly cosy Ben, who hides a man of power behind his seemingly jovial facade. A fearsome tyrant who never hesitates to remind Gus of his place in the hierarchy. Even though we know that Lars Mikkelsen has had several significant acting credits in the US and Britain, we are still amazed at how skillfully he masters a difficult British accent in front of a fellow actor who is a native English speaker.

We almost forget how much Harold Pinter's THE DUMB WAITER seems to be inspired by Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" (or, "While We Wait for Godot", as it is called in the revival at the Black Horse Theatre later this season).

The interplay between these two theatre veterans is a masterclass in acting, and their staccato repartee is a musical treat for the senses. So, don't hesitate and hurry to Krudttønden for a rare theatre experience.

(Michael Søby)

Sceneblog



Oi! Pipe down you lot!

That could have been the way the audience could have been asked to keep quiet before the performance *THE DUMB WAITER* started in Krudttønden. Because the two actors Lars Mikkelsen and Ian Burns put the most beautiful Cockney accent into the mouths of the two hitmen who impatiently walk around waiting for their orders and next victim - their next job.

The English-speaking That Theatre Company keeps the flag flying high for English drama in Denmark, and with legendary playwright Harold Pinter's *THE DUMB WAITER* on the poster, Artistic Director Ian Burns and the 25th anniversary *That Theatre* put a strong line under their status as not just a theatre - but as That Theatre!

The compressed and almost claustrophobically intense show is about Gus and Ben - two ageing assassin colleagues - waiting in a dark basement room for their orders and instructions on who to liquidate. Just like they've done so many times before, because Gus and Ben assassinate for a living, and they're good at it. But, when you're waiting, when you're bored, when you're **anxious,**

frustrations unfold and the pecking order falls into place. But Gus really wants to ask Ben many questions, because there was something about their last job that went wrong, wasn't there?

Little things bother the men, like a newspaper headline or whether the laces on their neatly polished patent leather shoes are the same length, and the more they wait, the more they think about the little things that don't work as they should. Who's going to make the tea that is indispensable in an English context? And is there a reason why the gas on the cooker is off?



Things have tightened up, mate.

Ian Burns is Gus, the underdog of the constellation, and Lars Mikkelsen is the experienced master whose word is law. But, in a dark basement room, the smallest things suddenly become immense, and the kitchen elevator in the wall - THE DUMB WAITER - is given a starring role in Pinter's absurdist theatre tradition, where it is up to the audience to interpret what actually happens when the otherwise abandoned and closed kitchen starts talking to the men in the basement.

Lars Mikkelsen is wonderful in the role of Ben - with the same lines that got him into acting school - and it's easy to see why he jumped at the idea for That Theatre's production. Because the director of THE DUMB WAITER is none other than Barry McKenna, the same McKenna who encouraged Mikkelsen to use Pinter's words in the audition. So, with Mikkelsen's harsh and

touching criminal portrait of Ben, along with Ian Burns' confident character acting and McKenna's streamlined, classic direction, That Theatre's THE DUMB WAITER at Krudttønden is the place to be right now.

So, in my humble opinion: That Theatre's THE DUMB WAITER is a dense little time-bomb of pent-up emotions in a very confined space. What's not to like?

THE DUMB WAITER plays at Krudttønden in Østerbro 27/9 - 21/10 2023.

Photo: Peter Reinhardt

d. 4 væg

By: Emilie Beske

WHAT IS IT?

In a dark basement in Birmingham, two assassins wait for news of who and when their next target will be. Waiting is their blissful friend, but this day it's disrupted, when they discover a kitchen lift sending orders for food.

The Dumb Waiter is Harold Pinter's 1957 one-act dark comedy, staged here by Barry McKenna and That Theatre Company.

WE SAY.

The Dumb Waiter follows a relatively simple setup. Two made beds, two doors (where do they lead to?), two actors and one kitchen lift (where does it lead to?). The effects are limited and the information is sparse, yet the play offers a high degree of complexity and, in particular, a strong technical ability. It can be done that easily.

The two actors are none other than Lars Mikkelsen, as the dominant Ben and Ian Burns as the submissive Gus. The two characters are like Cuckoo and Cuckoo, Dupont and Dupond, or Tweedledee and Tweedledum; they exist only in each other's opposites. Gus asks questions to map the landscape and is curious about the outside world. If he could choose, he wishes there was a window in the basement that could put his life into perspective.

Ben is his antithesis; mocking Gus' inquisitiveness, shooting it in flames. For him, the world is the way it is and you don't have to think about it too much.

This is how they pass the time: Gus wondering - why does the water take so long to boil? What city are they in? Why are they being sent an envelope with matches? And Ben who replies with; "That's just the way it is." The two assassins are trying to kill time while they wait for news. I find it hard to imagine being in the same situation: boringly alone while waiting. Something that seems completely unfamiliar in 2023, where we can constantly choose (or has the choice been made for us?) to be bombarded with information and stimuli. Maybe we're missing something? An underlying absurdity that we have numbed with our screens. In addition, it's strangely appealing to see the two characters in something as unfamiliar as waiting.

When suddenly a strange sound comes from the wall, skrttggggggboboiing, they discover the kitchen lift! Inside is a piece of paper with an order for two steaks and chips, two puddings and two teas without sugar. The basement turns out to have been an old kitchen with a café upstairs. Unwaveringly loyal to authority, they obey with what they have, sacrificing their own precious tea and an old packet of biscuits. This is how the orders follow, and they blindly obey orders from above. Perhaps it's easier to obey authority than to think for yourself? This is also the case in their

previous job, where Gus questions the murder of a girl. But, the hitman's job isn't to question, it's to obey.

Harold Pinter writes in the style of absurdist theatre, where descriptions of conditions prevail over an actual course of tension. This is also the case in *The Dumb Waiter*. The meaninglessness shows itself in stylistic repetition, such as when Gus opens the show by having to tie his shoelaces. It takes many attempts and great perseverance to get it right. Burns' brilliant physicality and caricatured facial expressions contribute to many laughs. The fact that the text is equally slow and full of repetition is only funny. Pinter writes ambiguously and denies his audience the satisfaction of knowing what exactly is going on, leaving the audience to think for themselves.

Director McKenna has set the show up 1:1 to the written word, which compliments Burns and Mikkelsen, who basically just have a really good base material that suits their years of experience. Ultimately, the show becomes a masterclass in comic timing and technique with Burns, Mikkelsen, McKenna and Pinter at the helm.

STUDENT AND POOR? HOW TO:

If you are under 25, you can find tickets for DKK 165. Members of My Theatre can get away with DKK 195 and a normal ticket costs DKK 235. But hurry, tickets are selling fast.

Morten Hede



"The Dumb Waiter" is British absurdism at its best

Lars Mikkelsen and Ian Burns in a marvellous pairing as the two mysterious men in the cellar in Harold Pinter's absurdist play 'The Dumb Waiter'.

As a playwright, English author and Nobel Prize winner Harold Pinter is known for his cryptic and intense situations in an almost dogmatic environment. The English-language theatre group That Theatre Company is now tackling his play 'The Dumb Waiter', which contains both absurdism a la Samuel Beckett and whodunit a la Agatha Christie.

We meet two well-dressed men in a sparsely furnished room with two beds. One of them, Ben, is played by Lars Mikkelsen. Mikkelsen, has a harsh and sullen expression as he tries to read the newspaper under his poor lighting from his bedside lamp. The other, Gus, played by Ian Burns, is gentler and more uncertain in expression and struggles to keep the laces tied on his shoes

From here, a slow dialogue follows, but with countless, seemingly insignificant buds dialogue moves slowly and steadily towards a climax. The tension curve takes a jump upwards when one of them nonchalantly pulls his gun out from under his pillow. And it gradually becomes apparent that there is a person to be assassinated and that this pair have done this kind of job countless times before. But, who is the next victim? Why do you need matches when there's no more gas in the stove? And what's the point of the kitchen lift going up and down from upstairs?

The meaninglessness is imbedded in the walls of Krudttønden as the questions pile up and reach into every nook and cranny, revealing the layers beneath the twisted Ben and the confused Gus.

It was approximately 30 degrees in Krudttønden's theatre on this opening night, and therefore difficult and barely bearable to sit through the 60 minutes or so that the performance lasts. And the intended slow tempo that characterizes the performance makes time stand still while sweat beads on your forehead.

Nevertheless, the performance is not a minute too long, as both Mikkelsen and Burns lead us through the text with detailed acting and tension through the text beautifully and captivatingly phrased in good Cockney dialects. Skillfully played.

You have to accept the absurd genre if you want to experience something extraordinary out of "TheDumb Waiter". I'm personally in favour of the genre. And not least, the scenic interpretation by director that Barry McKenna hits with a bullseye the depressingly funny and fateful void that this reviewer associates with Harold Pinter absurdism. But, I also understand those who think it's "something weird". Because it is.

"The Dumb Waiter" is not cosy theatre, but hard-edged pointlessness served with British British tea and Eccles cakes with loaded handguns and a strange mystery. Definitely recommended if you can stand the tension. The show is playing at Krudttønden in Copenhagen until 21 October 2023.

Playwright: Harold Pinter | Staging: Barry McKenna | Cast: Lars Mikkelsen and Ian Burns
Mikkelsen and Ian Burns | Lighting Design: Julian Simpson | Sound Design: Mark Jones | Produced
by: That Theatre Company