**The Catastrophic Theatre**

Presents

***The Danube*
by María Irene Fornés**

September 25 - October 17, 2015
Thursdays - Saturdays at 8 p.m.

**All tickets Pay-What-You-Can**

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In the year 2000 the now-defunct **Infernal Bridegroom Productions (IBP)** presented the Houston premiere of ***The Danube***, one of most memorable productions of that company’s 14-year history. Catastrophic artistic director **Jason Nodler**, who founded IBP, teamed with **Bobbindoctrin Puppet Theatre** artistic director **Joel Orr**, to direct four of Houston’s finest actors (**Amy Bruce**, **Troy Schulze**, **Charlie Scott**, and **Kyle Sturdivant**) in a production of the play that longtime **Village Voice** theatre critic **Michael Feingold** called “One of the most startlingly original and devastating things I can ever remember seeing on a stage.”

Of the Houston production **The Houston Press** wrote, “Especially gratifying are those moments when something shifts as the crowd is laughing, and everyone suddenly feels a little sick for having done so.”

15 years later Bruce, Schulze, Scott, Sturdivant, Orr, and Nodler reunite to create a new and improved version of this extraordinary play by one of the most intrepid playwrights of our modern era.

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One afternoon in the early 1980s, **María Irene Fornés** was walking past a thrift shop in Greenwich Village, New York when she noticed some strange old 78-rpm records in a bin. Liking the jacket of one of them, she bought it for a dollar. It turned out to be a series of basic Hungarian language lessons—simple phrases about everyday experiences like ordering in a restaurant or discussing the weather, spoken first in Hungarian then repeated in English. Taken with the endearing simplicity of the odd little conversations, she noted later: “I thought of how sorrowful I felt for the bygone era of that record and how sorrowful it would be to lose the simple pleasures of our own era.”

The play that resulted from this chance find, *The Danube*, begins in 1938 Budapest where young American businessman Paul Green meets a Hungarian bureaucrat named Mr. Sandor, Sandor’s friend Mr. Kovacs, and Sandor’s daughter Eve. Paul and Eve soon fall in love, but a mysterious, creeping sickness begins to infect them and spreads throughout the whole city and possibly the whole world.

As **Ross Wetzsteon** put it in a classic Village Voice profile of Fornés, *The Danube* “gathers unutterable poignancy as the characters begin to deteriorate before our eyes. The play forces us to face what we’re making of our world, not through stylistic flair or nuanced characterization or polemical narrative, but solely through a strikingly theatrical formal concept.” By keeping the focus entirely on the minute details of the innocuous aspects of life lived in a harrowing, apocalyptic context, Fornés creates a theatrical tone poem that is at times sweetly innocent, dryly funny, and heartbreakingly sad.

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**Miriam Daly** is composing new music and variations on “The Blue Danube” for the production. Scenic design is by **Kevin Holden**; painted backgrounds are created by **Lauren Davis** based on original designs by **Katie Jackson**; lighting design is by **Frank Vela**; costume design is by **Macy Lyne**; sound design is by **Shawn St. John**; prop design is by **Greg Dean**; Sturdivant serves as assistant director and stage management is by **Tawny Tidwell** with assistance from **Izabella Guerrero**. **Drew Hoovler** is master builder and **Lindsey Hardin** will operate lights and sound. The puppets that appear in this production were created by Bobbindoctrin Puppet Theatre for the 2000 production of the play.

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María Irene Fornés was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1930. She immigrated with her family to the United States in 1945 and was naturalized in 1951. From 1954 to 1957, she studied painting in Europe, where she saw Roger Blin’s famous production of Samuel Beckett’s *En attendant Godot*(pb. 1952, pr. 1953; Waiting for Godot, 1954). Fornes returned to the United States in 1957 and worked in New York as a textile designer. During this time, she read plays and began to think about moving into theater. In 1960, she created *The Widow*, which was first performed in New York in 1961 and then moved to Mexico in September of that year. In 1963 she joined the playwrights unit of the Actors Studio to further develop her writing skills. In the late 1960’s, she served as a costume designer for several avant-garde theater companies including the New Dramatists Committee and the Judson Poets Theatre. Fornes also wrote during this period and had some success with plays such as *The Successful Life of Three*and *A Vietnamese Wedding*. She won her first Obie award for playwriting in 1965, the same year *Successful Life of Three*was produced. In 1966 she had a brief experience with Broadway when *The Office*, a play she had written, had several previews at the Henry Miller but never opened.

Fornes continued to work in Off-Broadway and regional American theaters throughout the 1960’s and early 1970’s. In 1972 she helped found and run the New York Theater Strategy, an organization dedicated to the development of avant-garde theater artists. *Fefu and Her Friends*premiered in 1977 and earned an Obie award. Fornes received another Obie for direction in 1979. Fornes continued to write, producing some of her most popular works, including *Mud, The Conduct of Life*, and *Abingdon Square*.

Fornes has also been a major force in the development of young playwrights, especially those of Hispanic descent. She has spent a great deal of her time conducting workshops, classes, and projects on playwriting with a variety of students to bring new voices into the theater.

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*The Danube* opens Friday, September 25, at The Catastrophic Theatre, 1119 East Fwy, Houston, TX 77002. It runs Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays through October 17. All performances begin at 8 p.m. and all tickets are Pay-What-You-Can. The play runs 70 minutes with no intermission. For tickets or more information visit [www.catastrophictheatre.com](http://www.catastrophictheatre.com) or call our offices at 713-522-2723.