



JAMPA'S THEATRE  
Bouvard Pécuchet & Machig Lapdrön





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# Theatre

“The play’s the thing,” and much of Jampa’s life has been connected to theatre and to trying to decipher what is theatre and what is life. “Theatre” encompasses many kinds of performance, from the scale of Wagner’s operatic *Ring Cycle* to the *Monster in the Box* monologue of Spaulding Gray. A cardboard box can serve as a puppet theatre. A solo violinist playing for spare change in the subway or a mime following pedestrians and imitating their movements are also theatrical performances. “The show must go on,” whether it is a 3-ring circus, a Broadway musical, or a poet reading with or without a microphone in a bookstore.

Long strips of gossamer cloud  
The first stars step out on stage  
Wearing halos and wire wings  
I’m eager for the play to begin

Jampa was introduced to Shakespeare in grade school. He and some of his classmates memorized parts from Julius Cæsar. Jampa had the part of Mark Anthony: “The evil men do lives after them/The good is oft interred with their bones.” I come not to condemn or condone but to tell Jampa’s stories. There is a cosmic comedy underway. As Allen Ginsberg once told Jampa, “You are a clown.”



While at Oakland High, he went to San Francisco to see a traveling Old Vic performance of MacBeth, and at Cal, as a freshman, he saw a university performance, directed by Ariel Parkinson, of *The Tempest*. While at Cal, Jampa was a regular at The Cinema Guild & The Studio, an art movie house with two theatres, where he saw Lawrence Oliver’s movies of *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, and his favorite, *Richard III*. He considers these definitive performances, but he is not a snob and has enjoyed Kenneth Braganaugh’s *Henry*, a German *Hamlet* by Maximillian Schell, a punk version of *Romeo and Juliet*, a Nazi-like version of *Richard III*, and the post-modern *Searching for Richard* by Al Pacino. What about Mel Gibson as *Hamlet*? Jampa agrees with one critic who said that Shakespeare intended for

*Hamlet* to be pretending to be crazy, not to be crazy. Still, Mel’s version has the best swordplay.

The majority of Jampa's experiences of dramas have been in the movies but not all. He has had the opportunity to see *The Oresteia Trilogy* by Æschylus at the Greek Theatre at U.C. Berkeley, a Japanese Bunraku puppet drama, also at Berkeley, and classic English puppeteering, in an intimate setting, in Carmel, by Geddis and Martin, for whom George Bernard Shaw wrote a short play. Shaw claimed puppets were the ideal actors because they did not have their own interpretation of how a role should be played.

In Aptos, in 1962, Jampa and his wife, Patricia, joined The New Vic Theatre troupe. The New Vic was an outdoor theatre next to The Sticky Wicket Restaurant, owned and operated by Vic Jowers and his wife, Sidney. Vic was an Englishman, who had married his sweetheart, a math professor at Vaser, and they had settled in California. Vic had luck in finding sponsors for his theatre, and his friends helped him turn a vacant lot into an entertainment spot.

Besides pays, there were art exhibits and musical evenings. Robert Hughes, a student of noted composer, Lou Harrison, who lived in the area, arranged for classical ensembles and jazz combos to perform. During the intermissions, there were strolling minstrels. A note in a program reads:

*AN EVENING IN SALZBURG, 1790*

*The classic Viennese masters wrote a good deal of music for the outdoors, and Mozart, in particular, for the beautiful gardens of Salzburg. This evening's program tries to recreate the atmosphere of those rich summer evenings through the performance of that music in its original instrumentation, through sets and costumes, and with the help of that most eminent of Mozartians, Don Giovanni. With his song and sagacity he will guide you through the evening's program.*

*Divertimento No. 8, K.213.....Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*

*(conducted by the composer)*

*Octet in F Major.....Franz Josef Hayden*

*Rondino in E flat Major.....Ludwig van Beethoven*

*Intermission*

*Partia No. 1, in F Major.....Karl Ditter von Dittersdorf*

*Quintet No. 3, in B flat Major.....Johann Christian Bach*

*Serenade No. 12 in C Minor, K.388.....Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*

After every performance, the performers and audience would retire to the restaurant. Vic, feeling expansive, might open the taps for a round on the house, and the party would begin.

On another evening, Dave Hoffman's Jazz Ensemble, a quartet of San Francisco jazz artists. And on another date, An Intimate Evening with Geddis and Martin, actors with puppets from the Carmel Valley's Tantamount Theatre (not for children was advertised).

The stage was not much. Jampa and Ed Miller, with some help, knocked it together from sheets of plywood and 2x4s. There was a raised platform and a wing, stage left. It had a back and two, angled sides with a roof. Stage right, there was an entrance and exit door that led to a dressing and prop room, constructed from an old parachute, suspended like a tent on poles. The audience area was enclosed with a bamboo curtain on which paintings by local artists were hung. At the entrance, off the parking lot for the restaurant, there was a ticket booth, where *wassail* (hot cider & wine mix) was available along with copies of the plays. Food could be brought from the restaurant and eaten at small round tables.



MACHIG: I don't understand why you can't say the name of that play in the theatre. I said it, and everyone freaked.

JAMPA: It's superstition and tradition—shows you're in the know—keep teasing the actors, and you'll be blamed for every little thing that goes wrong.

BOUVARD: Alright, you two, are we on the same page or not? I'm talking about The New Vic Theatre, and it sounds to me like you're talking about The Old Vic.

To continue. The stage was only constructed to last the summer, and all the productions came off without any major mishap. There were five performances of Moliere's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* with Vic Jowers in the lead, as Monsieur Jourdain, the "Bourgeois," and a supporting cast of fourteen actors, four dancers and three singers, plus a nine-piece wind orchestra.

*DANCING MASTER: All the disasters, all the fatal misfortunes that make up the history of mankind—blunders of politicians, the mistakes of great commanders—they all come from not learning to dance. (from Act 1)*

There were four performances of Beckett's tragi-comedy, *Waiting for Godot*.

*VLADAMIR: To every man his little cross...Till he dies...And is forgotten.*

*ESTRAGON: In the meantime, let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent. (from Act 2)*

*Waiting for Godot* by the Irish playwright, Samuel Beckett, is the archetype of "Theatre of the Absurd" drama. The play was originally written in French (*En Attendant Godot*) and later translated by the author into English. It was first produced in 1953 at the Little Theatre de Baylone and ran 400 performances there. Life may be meaningless, but this play was meaningful to Jampa.

Jampa played Estragon to Edwin Miller's Vladimir. Jampa was new to theatre. He had not experienced being in almost continual proximity to actors, who, once they had learned their lines and "entered" into their roles, tended to live their part on a daily basis, as though they had walked through a mirror. In researching his part, Jampa went to a performance of *Godot* at a theatre-in-

the-round in San Francisco, and he listened to a recorded performance. He could not help but be influenced by the vocal inflection of Burt Larr on the recording. He thought the actor in the City had nothing on his moves, which the drama critic from *The Examiner* later praised as “Chaplinsque.”

Jampa also had a small part, as the Tailor, in the comedy-ballet by Moliere. The director of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* was Lawrence Berscheid, a friend of Vic and Sidney’s, a professional director from Scottsdale, Arizona, who volunteered his services. He brought with him his leading lady, Laura Wills. Laura became friends with Lyn Beare, who played Lucille, the daughter of Monsieur and Madame Jourdain, played by Vic and Laura. Lyn was cast as A Boy in *Godot*, and in her real life was breaking up with her boyfriend, William Tara, the director of *Waiting for Godot*. Larry was taking Laura to Lake Tahoe to watch some summer stock repertory theatre, and he asked Jampa and Lyn to join them. “A good experience,” he said.

While Jampa watched *The Man Who Came to Dinner* in a rustic setting, he held hands with Lyn. Later, beneath the moon, they kissed. Meanwhile, in Aptos, under the same moon, Patricia, Jampa’s real-life wife, who had a role in *Le Bourgeois*, as a servant, was kissing Ed Miller. Nicole and Vladimir. Historically, Moliere created interesting “chemistries,” by accommodating his actors and actresses in their love affairs or to pair them to create jealousies.

MACHIG: It is hard to keep track of all these star-crossed lovers leaving one realm to be someone else in another realm and in love with another person somewhere else.

BOUVARD: It was confusing to them, as well. I am reminded of a story. The Barrymores—Ethel, Lionel, and their son, John—were all on stage together. There was a hiatus in the dialogue. The prompter gave the line, but there was no response. He gave the line again. Still, no response. He gave it a third time, and this time it elicited a response from Ethel. It could be heard by the audience. “We all know what the line is, but whose is it?”

When Jampa left Pat at the end of the summer, Bill Tara gave Jampa the phone number of his friend, Alex, in New York. She was married to Jon Springer, who has remained a life-long friend of Jampa’s. Jon and Alex gave Jampa shelter. Not long ago, after Jampa returned to Tara Mandala from Santa Rosa and ten years of caregiving his elderly parents, a young man, who was cooking for the retreat center, told Jampa that he was one of Alex’s sons from a second marriage and that she said to say, “Hello, out there.”

Jampa mainly performs on stage by reading his poetry. One of his favorite performances was a collaboration with Steve Fisk, who now lives in Tacoma. He is a composer and sound engineer. [www.stevefisk.com](http://www.stevefisk.com). He helped Jampa create staggered repetitions of words through four speakers set in a quadrant, at a city park in Ellensburg—“quadraphonic sequencing”—with a tape loop run through a reel-to-reel tape deck and around a mike stand.

The words of the poem were lifted from a magazine article that contained place names used in arrangements to sound like sentences: “What Sumatra Java fight?” and “Ceylon, Abysynia.” Alia,

Jampa's wife, said it did not seem original. Jampa said it would be when he was done. He sat on a chair in the middle of the four speakers; the chair tipped over; and the poet read from the ground on his side. When asked what that was about, Jampa said, "It's dance—classical ballet ascends and post-modern dance plummets to earth."

In the same vein, there is a piece Jampa is yet to perform. It will take place in an art gallery, and the audience will look at the artwork, while the poet reads facing a wall.

#### FURNITURE POEM

for Steve

start with two marks  
wisp of a world

on the cusp of chaos  
and in this corner

a hint of disclosure  
about a continent in stasis

ambient poetry  
elevator murmurs

A more conventional performance was his collaboration with Christine Ho, dancing to his poem, "Too Many Horses, Not Enough Saddles," at Quicksilver Gallery in Forestville, California, the evening George Bush was elected to his second term, and Jampa decided to wear his robes full time. Christine is a medical doctor and a Vajrayana yogini. Before he took vows as a monk, she was the one person he asked if she had any romantic inclinations towards him. She said no.

They collaborated again on a dance-skit at Tara Mandala, in 2008, after the episode with the bear that kept breaking into the staff's yurts. The skit was entitled "The Teacher" and is a part of *The Magic Bear* (Kapala Press, 2009). David Petit gave the performance high marks, which pleased Jampa. Another spontaneous performance occurred on a hillside near the Tara Temple, while Jampa recited a story called "The Yogi & the Lizard," for Tulku Sang-ngag and a small group of students, and Christine danced the part of the lizard.



## THE YOGI & THE LIZARD

A lot of creatures hereabouts are young and skittish, but one old lizard pulls up and we palaver. He (or she) gets a bit of Dharma from me, and I get a bit of lizard wisdom from him. The usual from me: “Rare is one’s luck to find the Holy Dharma.” All things are impermanent. Consider this and practice, so you will be free of regret at the time of death.”

From him: “Rare is the opportunity to rest in the sun in a solitary place safe from predators (and busy bodies) and close to a hidey hole. While I rest, I visualize myself as a winged dragon, and I ascend into the sky, soar once around Ekajati Peak, fly across Hidden Valley to Chimney Rock, being very careful not to spook David’s horses. Then, I settle on my rock again, in a state beyond image, and hang out.

Jampa wrote a scene for Gabriela Anaya Del Alma and myself, which is included in *Roses of Crimson Fire*. My vanity overcomes my common sense, and I include it here.

## SPARKS

*[Two actors sit center stage at a round table in a pin of light.]*

BOUVARD: You are the embodiment of wild desire. You’d look good even in pajamas. If I’d met you first, I’d be with you, but I’m with her, and she’s the best for me.

ALMA: She’s the best for you? You’ve got to have an edge to love? I’m not good at loving third-party people. Have I been here before?

BOUVARD: We get caught up in our feelings when acting with other actors.

ALMA: Leave it alone, Bouvard, the geography between us is a shield. Don’t cut yourself off from wild desire. I’ve done it.

BOUVARD: I’m faithful to love, but it’s not going to control me, just because all things have sex. It’s torture to worry about us cheating.

ALMA: Too stressful, to be honest. Too stressful to be honest. I love this crush.

*[She takes a drink from a tall latté.]*

BOUVARD: Hard in this life, you’ve only got one body.

ALMA: Only one flag, only one life, only one leaf. Good line, Bouvard.

BOUVARD: I want to coddle...I mean cuddle you, well, both, but I know you have a natural feminine, non-toxic, body-pure immunity to adultery.

ALMA: You’re right, I am careful about hygiene. It’s a thing with me, but [unctuously] if I was to be unfaithful, it would be with you.

BOUVARD: You, you, you...at least, you’re not dumb. Blind, maybe, but not dumb.

[He takes a sip from her glass.]

ALMA: True love's an exotic club, that's for sure, and we got the talent for it.

BOUVARD: [He rises.] True love is just a romantic notion.

[She finishes her drink.]

ALMA: Keep it up. [Her line overlaps his.]

BOUVARD: Do you give heart?

ALMA: I struggle to keep house. I do everything but cook. I can spend the whole day reading in bed. No reason to find someone else, beside me.

BOUVARD: And people have everything, including self-sabotage.

*[He sits.]*

ALMA: Why are you fidgeting?

BOUVARD: [Straightening himself in his chair] My pants are too tight in the crotch.

ALMA: If I had to choose between my survival and my dignity, I'd choose love.

BOUVARD: [Wistfully] Yes, I miss the hungry years—but not too much. Then, you don't have time for love.

ALMA: No, but you encourage my wild side. [Half rising with excitement] There's a charm in love affairs. Fun to be with you. Pure passion. Endless. Reckless.

BOUVARD: A kiss from you couldn't hurt, babe.

ALMA: With kisses come consequences. *[She slumps.]*

BOUVARD: I know you could cook my perfect omelet, too.

ALMA: [Ignoring him] Once, I went on a date with a guy. We walked on the beach. I kissed him, but he didn't call. Wished he had. I took my blouse off. Had on a plaid skirt and boots. Took off one boot because he wanted to see if I had cankles.

BOUVARD: Cankles?

ALMA: He wanted to see if he could tell where my calves left off and my ankles began. I knew he didn't have balls.

BOUVARD: And I'm playing the part of a...I just feel intoxicated by my desire for you. I could kiss you all night. [Nonchalant] Just a physical fact.

ALMA: *[She puts both gloved hands over her ears.]* I can't hear a thing you're saying.

BOUVARD: It's nothing. All the same a kiss from you couldn't hurt, babe.

*[Dim lights. Sparks fly.]*



JAMPA: It is my contention that Tantric practice should be more like theatre and less like punishment. You are the star. Break a leg.

MACHIG: Wouldn't that hurt?

JAMPA: "Break a leg" is only an expression of encouragement. The idea is to do well enough to have an encore and break the leg of the curtain.

