

How Angry Actors chased Me down the Old Kent Road.

When OVE Theatre announced its debut Production it certainly set many tongues, and a few tails, wagging. So I went to Catford to interview the Founders – Olivia and Warran Orbit.

“Our story's like many others,” says Olivia, who talks for the Group. “We both drifted around for years. Then found each other. Then found our vocation.”

“I'm walking down the street,” says Warran, “when I see this beautiful woman...”

“Please don't tell that story, Warran,” says Olivia.

“And I say, *What's your name?* And she says, *Olivia*. And I say, *I know you live 'ere*. *I asked what your name was...*”

When Warran stops laughing, Olivia tells me quickly that the Company's name stands for OMNIS VITA EST which means 'All Life is One'. It is the principle which guides their life and work. “Now come and meet our wonderful Cast.”

Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' is rarely seen these days. But in its 70th anniversary year OVE Theatre promise a performance like no other.

Olivia explains on the way to the studio: “Theatre is changing. It's more inclusive. An 83 year old can play Hamlet. A 9 year old will play Lear with the Prague Youth Theatre at this year's Edinburgh Festival. So anyone can play anyone these days? No. Too many are still excluded.”

She opens the door and said, “Prepare to be amazed.”

I am not frightened of dogs. As a rule.

But to sit in the first row of a theatre with four of them glaring at me from the front of the stage scratching themselves is a little unnerving. Especially when they start panting.

“We have to call it 'Waiting for Dogot,’” says Olivia. “The Beckett copyright people are so terribly legally wegalsy about things. But that fits our bill very nicely, as if happens. These two Mongrels (pardon my French, guys) play the Tramps. The Bulldog is Big Bully Pozzo. And the one-eyed Spaniel is Lucky, of course.”

I ask if they actually speak their lines.

“Not yet, they can't,” sighs Olivia. “But they emote the piece brilliantly with all seven of their big sad eyes. They follow stage directions precisely. And we have already seen progress in their language acquisition. We are confident they will be word perfect on the night. Life is all one. We're breaking down the barriers between species. Isn't it exciting?”

OVE began when Olivia and Warran found two tortoises and a hedgehog hiding in an old suitcase in a skip. As the poor creatures refused to leave their home and it was Warran who realised that they were in fact performing their own version of 'Huis Clos' ('No Exit') the existential dramatic masterpiece by Jean-Paul Sartre. The Orbits' lives changed forever.

Olivia wrote to Prince (now King) Charles about their discovery and HRH wrote back: *Jolly good! Keep going. Can't wait to see it!*

“We're still working on that one,” says Olivia. “But 'Dogot' is only the first of many productions we plan. “Gigi” with real Poodles. “Romeo and Juliet” with Rabbits. 'The Garden of Eden' with Macaque Monkeys as Adam and Eve and a Python as Satan. And Karel Capek's 'The Insect Play'...”

“With real Insects?” I suggest.

“Don't be ridiculous,” she corrects me. “Insects simply will not accept Direction. There are limits, you know.”

It was at this point that all 4 dogs growled and leapt off the stage straight onto me.

Somehow I got away and fled down the length of the Old Kent Road with the furious hounds snapping at my heels. Olivia ran beside me apologising. Warran followed trying to catch the Actors with a butterfly net. When he finally succeeded Olivia begged me to give them a second chance.

“We are so sorry,” she said. “I don't know what came over them. Don't tell anyone.”
I accepted their apologies and promised to return.

Later I discovered one possible cause of the disaster. A still-warm Sausage Roll was crushed in my jacket pocket. I had bought it as revenge on my vegetarian partner. When we have rows I don't say anything nasty. I simply go out, buy something very meaty, and eat it somewhere quiet. The odour must have driven those canine Actors wild.

If you ever see Olivia and Warran don't tell them. I think I got away with it.
Unless those 4-legged Thespians really do learn how to speak...