

Mr Baldocci

Synopsis and Other Performance Notes

scene, action, voice-messages, synopsis

Scene

The scene portrays Mr Baldocci's living room: an intimate, dimly lit living space. Here is a piano and an answerphone machine positioned to the right of the music stand. Close to the piano is a small table with a whisky bottle and glass, as well as an old vinyl player, on which the protagonist plays some records during the course of the show. In a corner of the room there is another cabinet with a drawer, in which a gun is stored. On this cabinet, in plain sight, there is a telephone. On the walls there are a clock hanging askew, a mirror, and some posters of Freddie Mercury. Also, there is a door, from which Mr Baldocci enter and exits.

Scattered here and there, on the table, on the piano, on the floor, there are fragments of scores, books and albums/vinyls. These latter have to include albums by Gabriele Baldocci himself and albums by Queen.

The lights should avoid illuminating the protagonist clearly and explicitly. On the contrary, Mr Baldocci's face should remain in dim light, so that his identity can emerge in an imprecise and ambiguous way.

The scene, ideally, should be set in the late 80s-early 90s.

Action

The performer only performs through actions and piano playing. He does not speak. The only spoken/textual elements emerge from the answerphone machine, from which Mr Baldocci plays about twenty voice-messages.

All the actions the character has to perform are indicated in the score-script, which features a dense web of original music, stylistic pastiches, theatrical and directorial indications, voice-messages, and some philosophical notes outlining the character's profile and his drama.

Generally, Mr Baldocci is constantly perplexed and lost in thought. His actions (and playing) have to be determined by a sense of incompleteness. Mr Baldocci does not do, he attempts; he begins but does not finish; he searches but cannot find; he goes but comes back. Most importantly, he does not state: he alludes. Everything he attempts is not concluded: musical phrases and physical gestures are unfinished, interrupted or mistaken. He lingers in his doing, only to eventually move on to something else. When he seems to have found something – a tune or an information – this quickly turns out to be something else. When confronted with a choice (particularly towards the end), he cannot make a decision.

Mr Baldocci is a man of post-truth – a victim of our post-truth world, perhaps. He is unable to discern truth from its distortion. When both his psychoanalyst and a mysterious mafioso, towards the end of the show, put him before a final twofold choice – to either destroy the world or kill himself - he is unable to make a final choice. His world is dominated by 'alternative truths', which are nothing more than false truths, manipulated facts, fabrications.

Voice-messages

All the messages indicated in the score-script are pre-recorded, and come from the answerphone machine positioned on / next to the piano. All messages are left by different

voices, with the exception of *The Agent*, *Van Rental Centre*, *A Russian Pianist*, and *The Mafioso*, who have left more than one message.

All messages are in English, except those in Russian, Italian, and partly Spanish, as indicated on the score-script.

Synopsis

Given the seemingly nebulous, fragmented nature of Mr Baldocci's central theme and its musico-theatrical material, as well as the wider representation of post-truth, the narrative arc does not proceed in a necessarily linear way. It slowly unfolds an existentialist drama rather than providing a logical narration. Outlining a traditional synopsis is therefore not immediately possible and, perhaps, it is not the most appropriate way to capture the piece's storyline; as there isn't (just) one.

Nevertheless, it is possible to articulate Mr Baldocci in four main parts, as follows.

First Part The first part functions as an exposition. In it, Mr Baldocci enters his leaving room (the stage), abruptly and agitated, as if chased by someone. Once inside and at ease, he slowly begins looking for clues – clues that can help him form his identity, recollect his memories, find a sense for himself. He browses some books looking for a hint, leafs through music scores in search of a tune, tries melodies at the piano, and so on. All these attempts trigger memories, signs and traces, though he is unable to join or complete them; he appears unable to draw a complete figure of himself out of them.

Alongside this exploration, his actions include a number of evocative gestures that contribute to forming the character's lingering and erratic profile: he tries to straighten a clock hanging askew, looks at himself in a mirror, browses through books, vinyl records and scores, toys with a gun, sips constantly from a whisky glass, and so on. When at the piano, he fiddles with various melodies, juxtaposing and transforming them. He often confuses them, and never manages to bring them to an end. All his actions are fluid and constantly changing, as if in a fragmented stalemate.

During this first part of the drama he plays a number of voice-messages from the answerphone machine, including some from friends and admirers, from his agent, from a van rental company confirming a booking he made, from a bizarre Russian pianist who scolds him for not being at a rehearsal, from an artist insurance company, and from a mysterious mafioso, with a very threatening tone, who orders him to bring a bag of money to the Moscow Conservatory. All these messages generate allusive connections to a web of possible background stories and musical references, as well as Mr Baldocci's possible lives.

This first part of the show concludes with a typically postmodern voice-message from a salesman promoting a brand-new collection of iconic novels dedicated to multiple personalities, ambiguous identities and hazy plots.

Second Part The second part gradually leads toward an internal conflict. The many fragments, references and inconclusive elements emerged in the first part have generated a sense of frustration and disquiet. Mr Baldocci thus finds refuge in the whisky, and slowly drinks up quite a few glasses until becoming more and more drunk. This passage is marked by some very agitated piano playing and distorted works by Shostakovich and Debussy, which gradually becomes clumsy, dazed, slurred, with inebriated mood swings. In a way, Mr Baldocci begins realising that his confused fragments and citations will only lead him towards existentialist chaos.

During this second part he listens to some more voice-messages: the previous van rental company calling back to cancel his booking, his dear friend Martha Argerich alluding to a fake passport he can use to change his identity and escape to Patagonia, and another call from the mafioso, who threatens him with death.

The intertwining of voice-messages, the agitated playing and the drunkenness become nearly unbearable. Like a drunkard who wants to abandon his thoughts to the music, Mr Baldocci goes to the stereo, rummages through the albums, and eventually plays *Don't Stop Me Now* by Queen, culminating in a liberating, awkward and euphoric dance.

Third Part The third part follows with a voice-message from Doctor Sigmund, Mr Baldocci's psychoanalyst. His words put him on alert, and give start to the protagonist's final realisation. Doctor Sigmund reveals that Mr Baldocci suffers the Mercury Syndrome, and his 'obsession towards memories and fragments' and his 'inability to complete a piece' are at the heart of his existentialist conflict. Almost incredulous, Mr Baldocci heads to the piano and forces himself to play and conclude a melody, though no matter how hard he tries, he is always blocked by an undefined force.

Mr Baldocci is at the apex of a logical confusion. He understands that his identity is not something he had forgotten, but instead something that is too complex and contradictory to be captured. He recognises himself as an emblem of post-truth: in fact, the truth about his own identity reveals to be a matter of secondary, even superfluous importance.

At this point, another voice-message from the Mafioso comes in. It is yet another criminal warning, but this time Mr Baldocci listens to it with great attention, and perceives it as an existential warning, as an invitation to act. Similarly to Doctor Sigmund, the Mafioso puts him in front of a twofold choice: "you got two possibilities: or you get the gun and you kill them all, or you shoot yourself".

Fourth Part The fourth and final part features a somehow cathartic and resolute opening. The messages left by the psychoanalyst and the mafioso have opened a glimmer of light, for Mr Baldocci, an idea on how he could deal with his own incompleteness. He thus initiates a melancholic musical performance superimposing a recording of Baldocci's own *Valdemossa*, a piano rendering of Tchaikovsky's *Autumn Song*, and a slowly ticking metronome; a performance that anyway get truncated before its end.

Such an evocative superimposition leads to a final voice-message: a sort of meta-reflection on the whole piece. This is a message by Pyrandel, the manager of a label called Imperfect Records. He is looking for Mr Baldocci to get him on board a new album dedicated to unfinished pieces by historical composers. His idea is to produce an album that only captures the many, possible conclusions an interrupted piece can generate. He is interested 'in the multiple possibilities of a story, not the story itself'.

Mr Baldocci thus composes himself in the mirror, takes the gun from the drawer, quickly plays a politically-scented tune at the piano, starts the vinyl player, and leaves the scene. Everything remains still for a few seconds. Then, in the distance, a shot is heard.

The End.