



# spymonkey

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## SPYMONKEY'S STIFF

Forbes Murdston, the great tragedian, has suffered writer's block for years. But now, at last, he has his own personal tragedy to draw upon. After the loss of his wife, he gathers around him an enthusiastic troupe of actors to produce a moving tribute to his dear, departed love. Mr Keller the embalmer, Alfredo Graves the pallbearer and Mandy Bandy the make-up artist are determined to make a night of it...

Directed by Cal McCrystal

'Brilliant, endearing, inventive ... You'll weep with laughter' The Guardian

This internationally acclaimed black comedy has delighted audiences as far apart as Mexico, Finland, Syria and the USA.

## BOX OFFICE INFORMATION

The Company	Spymonkey
Title of Show	Spymonkey's Stiff
Photo Credit	Bernhard Fuchs
Duration	75 minutes, NO INTERVAL
Age Suitability	12 plus
Performers	Aitor Basauri (Spain) Stephan Kreiss (Germany) Petra Massey (UK) Toby Park (UK)
Director	Cal McCrystal
Authors	Cal McCrystal and The Company
1st UK Performance	December 1998, Komedia, Brighton

Outline

Forbes Murdston gathers around him a trio of undertakers to enact a moving tribute to his dear departed wife. They are determined to make a night of it!

## **PRESS QUOTES**

Winner, Total Theatre Award 2000

“This is a tragical tale and you’ll weep, but only with laughter.. On the evidence of this endearing, inventive show [the company] should have a very long life”  
The Guardian, UK

“\* \* \* \* \* Dead cert killer hit... This show is a real beaut: perfect punning, gruesome slapstick, the epitome of knockabout farce. The company break moulds with as much fresh originality as Not The Nine O Clock News and Fawlty Towers did in their day” The List, UK

“Polished and perfected so that it sparkles like a freshly-cut gemstone. Side-splittingly hilarious.” Total Theatre Magazine, UK

“Impeccable black comedy” La Reforma, Mexico

“The smartly silly inventions of a superbly skilful cast levitated me into a state of snickering convulsing and literally teary-eyed happiness... I nearly died laughing”  
The Times, UK

“Inspired, inventive, irresistible - the most fun anyone has found in the undertaking business since Evelyn Waugh wrote The Loved One.”  
Houston Chronicle, USA

“Funeral parlours don’t become more morbidly comic than in this off-beat exploration of death” Independent On Sunday, UK

“Seriously, outrageously, cleverly funny - an ensemble tour de force” The Herald, UK

“Tears of laughter... Hilarious choreography... A jewel of black English humour, mining a rich seam of the absurd” Tagesanzeiger, Switzerland

“Hilarious, gleeful black humour” The Independent

“\* \* \* \* \* Stunningly original gem” Edinburgh Evening News

## **COPY SHEET**

### 41 Words

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## SHOW HISTORY

At the end of 1997 Spymonkey began working with Cal McCrystal on the show that became *Stiff*. It was premiered at Komedia in Brighton in December 1998, toured briefly in the UK and in Switzerland, and was then reworked in spring 2000, with Stephan Kreiss taking over the role of Mr Keller from Swiss actor Paul Weilenmann.

Since the show's meteoric success with both critics and audiences at Edinburgh 2000 (where they picked up a Total Theatre Award) they have delighted audiences and critics around the world, performing in Houston Texas, Aspen Comedy Festival (performing alongside Steve Martin and Billy Crystal), London's South Bank, Mexico, Finland, France, Spain, Switzerland, Austria, Ireland, Hungary, Syria, Czech Republic, Romania, Taiwan and Canada. In the UK '*Stiff*' has enjoyed performances at the 2001 British Council showcase of the best of British theatre, Brighton Paramount Comedy Festival and sell-out shows at the Purcell Room and the Queen Elizabeth Hall, South Bank. The QEH show in 2003 was to be the last performance of '*Stiff*' before Spymonkey were invited to perform in Cirque du Soleil's risqué burlesque show *Zumanity*. We are delighted to have this opportunity to revive the show that set Spymonkey on its path as an internationally acclaimed company.

## COMPANY HISTORY

"Groundbreaking and sharply brilliant, Spymonkey dance along the very boundary of artistic bravery. They take big risks in their work, and manage to be both true to a highly experimental process AND take their audience with them on that journey. Our loss is Las Vegas's gain" *Julian Crouch, Improbable Theatre, 2002*

With their dark, edgy physical comedy rooted 'somewhere between Monty Python, the Marx Brothers and Samuel Beckett' (*The Houston Chronicle*), and a quartet of performers from Spain, Germany and England, Spymonkey have proved to be a truly international phenomenon, enjoyed by and accessible to a wide range of international audiences.

"Deliriously funny - credit this young European troupe with impeccable taste in influences and a skill to match the originals" *Globe & Mail, Canada*

"Among the country's brightest young companies." *The Times*

The cultural and linguistic diversity of the group and their unique blend of physical comedy and explosive surrealism has won them a deserved international reputation: at the time of writing they have performed in 17 countries from the US, Canada and Mexico to Syria and Taiwan. International promoters spotted early on the opportunity that Spymonkey's work offers: original work that simultaneously represents the best in contemporary British theatre and rich comic entertainment. In the words of Patrick Brazier, then director of the British Council in Damascus, Spymonkey are a "superlative example to the world that there is more to British theatrical culture than just Shakespeare."

## BIOGRAPHIES

**AITOR BASAURI (performer & artistic director)** studied at the Centro Andaluz de Teatro in Seville and at the Philippe Gaulier School in London. Performed in *The Servant of Two Masters* at Sheffield Crucible (1996), *Axomate* at the Seville Expo (1992), *Eulenspiegel* (1991) and in Karl's Kuhne Gassenchau's *Grand Paradis* and *Stau* in Zurich (1997 and 1998). Director of *Little Prince* for Donkey Productions (1997), *Un Vento Impetuoso* for La Canoppia (1996) and *Meci Y Me Fui* for Pez Enraya (1997). In 1999 he appeared in Circus Knie, the Swiss State Circus, and in 2000 formed his own company Punto Fijo, based in Bilbao. Appeared in Cirque Images' 2003 series *Solstrom* for Bravo Cable Network. Performed in *Zumanity - Another Side of Cirque du Soleil* at the New York New York Hotel Casino, Las Vegas, 2003-05

**PETRA MASSEY (performer & artistic director)** BA (Hons) in Performing Arts at Middlesex University. Trained with Philippe Gaulier and John Wright in London. Worked extensively in street theatre and stand-up around the world, before forming her own company and performing her successful one-woman show *Panic* in Canada, New Zealand and the UK. Directed and performed with Mamaloucos in *Mama Loves Ya* (1996) and in the same year joined Karl's Kuhne Gassenchau for *Grand Paradis*, *S.T.E.I.N.B.R.U.C.H* (1997), and *Stau* in Switzerland in 1998. In 1999 she appeared with Circus Knie, and in 2000 trained with De La Guarda at The Roundhouse, London. She appeared in Cirque Images' series *Solstrom* (2003) for the Bravo cable network, *Hyperdrive* (2005) for BBC2 (and is due to appear in the second series in 2007). Performed in *Zumanity - Another Side of Cirque du Soleil* at the New York New York Hotel Casino, Las Vegas, 2003-05.

**TOBY PARK (performer & artistic director)** BA (Hons) in Drama at Hull University. Trained at Fool Time Circus School, Bristol, and with Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneaux in Paris. From 1994-97 he was co-musical director and actor with Karl's Kuhne Gassenchau in Zurich, creating with them *S.T.E.I.N.B.R.U.C.H* (1994), *R.U.P.T.U.R.E* (1995) and *Grand Paradis* (1997). Played Othello in BAC Walking Orchestra's *Othello Music* (1999). Improvising musician on Improbable Theatre's *Lifegame* (1998) (with an off-Broadway run in 2000), and *Animo* (1999). Musical director and composer for: Guy Dartnell's *Would Say Something* (1998), winner of the Time Out Best of the Fringe Award '98; Circus Space shows *Investments* (1999) and *The Event* (1999) with the Millennium Dome aerial performers; acro-dance-theatre Membre's *Sprung* (2001) and *Trip-Tic* (2003). Appeared in Cirque Images' 2003 series *Solstrom* for Bravo Cable Network. Performed in *Zumanity - Another Side of Cirque du Soleil* at the New York New York Hotel Casino, Las Vegas, 2003-05.

**STEPHAN KREISS (associate performer)** Joined Spymonkey in 2000. Trained with Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux and with Atelier International de l'Acteur (Paris 1987/88). Theatre credits include *Notfalls Belau* and *The Pool* for YBY in Salzburg; *Hello, We Must Be Going* and *The Marx Brothers* with Jos Houben and Johnny Hutch; *Penny Dreadful* for the Right Size; *Notre Dame de Paris*, *La Tulipe Noir* and *Tale of Two Cities* for Theatre Sans Frontieres. Tours as

*Der Legendäre Lustige* in Germany and Austria with his one-man-show *Hilfe - Ich Bin Unsterblich* . Appeared in Cirque Images' 2003 series *Solstrom* for Bravo Cable Network. Performed in *Zumanity - Another Side of Cirque du Soleil* at the New York New York Hotel Casino, Las Vegas, 2003-05.

**CAL McCRYSTAL (writer/director)** Cal McCrystal trained at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and with Philippe Gaulier and Pierre Byland. He has worked extensively as an actor in television, theatre, film and radio. His writing and directing credits include *Let the Donkey Go* (Final Direction) , *I Am a Coffee* and *Horses for Courses* for Peepolykus; two major tours for Cambridge Footlights; *AutoBoosh* and *The Mighty Boosh* , which won the Perrier Award for Best New Comedy and which became a hit BBC TV series; *Stiff* (which won a Total Theatre Award) and *Cooped* for Spymonkey; *Fever! The Peggy Lee Story* and *Music to Watch Boys By* for Kate Dimbleby; Orton's *Loot* and Alan Bennett's *Kafka's Dick* at the Derby Playhouse; *The Bubonic Play* for Piggy Nero; *The Specialists* for the comedy string trio Pluck ; *Curtain Raisers* with Chris Green at Tate Britain; *The BBQ Burlesque* for Just for Laughs, Montreal; pantomimes at the Corn Exchange, Newbury; and shows at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe for Gavin and Gavin, Population 3, Mel and Sue, Alice Lowe and the Cambridge Footlights. He was the comedy director for Sacha Baron-Cohen who hosted the 2005 MTV European Music Awards in Lisbon. In 2002 he joined Cirque du Soleil to create clown routines for its touring show, *Varekai* . He was then invited to be director of comedy for its television series, *Solstrom* , and its erotic cabaret, *Zumanity - Another Side of Cirque du Soleil* in Las Vegas. Currently working on a film of *The Bubonic Play* , a new musical for Piggy Nero set in Tibet called *Hello Dalai*, and the new Spymonkey show. [www.calmccrystal.com](http://www.calmccrystal.com)

**LUCY BRADRIDGE (production design)** Lucy Bradridge studied English Literature at Leeds University before training at the Central School of Speech and Drama. Production designer for *Stiff* (1998) and *Cooped* (2001). Her numerous theatre and comedy design credits include *The Wizard of Oz* for Dog Theatre (1997); *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (1998) and *This Way Up* (1999) for the Cambridge Footlights; Mel and Sue's *Back To Our Roots* tour (1999); the Open Mike Awards for Avalon Productions (2000-02); *AutoBoosh* (2000); *Fever! The Peggy Lee Story* (2000) and *Music to Watch Boys By* (2001) for Kate Dimbleby; and *The Last Chancers* for Angel Eye TV and Channel 4 (2003); Piggy Nero's *The Bubonic Play* (2005); *Moonjourney* starring Alice Lowe (2005); musical trio Pluck in *The Specialists* ; wardrobe assistant on Andrew Wooley's feature *Stoned* (2005). She designed the clowns' costumes and props for Cirque du Soleil's *Varekai* (2002) and *Zumanity* (2003). This year's projects include work with Circus Space and the Cardboard Citizens.

## **AUDIENCES**

The show has always successfully reached out to audiences not usually accustomed to attending theatre.

Twenty-something, comedy and alternative cabaret audiences are the most obvious target audience – the piece perhaps appeals to their dark sense of humour and appreciation of the absurd and ironic. The poster and flier have been created with this audience in mind.

During its recent outings in Europe and at its sell-out Edinburgh run the production has successfully attracted a loyal cult following. This is something which we are sure will continue during the current tour.

The piece was created through a process of comedy improvisation and is a very interesting showpiece for this method of creating theatre. The production has been very popular with comedy audiences and with students of drama and English literature.