Theatre of the ABSURD

By ‘Lou’Antraniece Humphrey
What is Theatre of the Absurd?

Theatre of the Absurd is not a group of artists, or an organization, or people who form some type of union. It is a group of unorthodox plays where the playwrights only seek to express their visions of the world. It is very similar to a poem where instead of saying exactly what they mean they make metaphors for the readers or audiences to interpret. Leaving the affect very controversial, and unique which really make these logical plays work.
Significant People of Absurd Theatre:

Eugene Ionesco  
Jean Genet  
Arthur Adamov  
Samuel Beckett
History:

- made appearance shortly after the rise of Greek drama, the plays of Aristophanes
- World War II was catalyst bringing absurd theatre to life; the experience of absurdity became a daily experience; resulting trauma of living under constant threats
- further developed in the classical period by Lucian, Petronius, and Apuleius
-often contain hardly any recognizable characters with unmotivated actions

dialogue is usually meaningless babble

-start confusing, ends just as confusing

¨understood as a kind of intellectual shorthand for a complex pattern of similarities in approach, method, and convention, of shared philosophical and artistic premises, whether conscious or subconscious, and of influences from a common store of tradition.¨
Martin Esslin:

Wrote a book titled *Theatre of the Absurd* creating the term in 1962

"general effect is often a nightmare or dreamlike atmosphere in which the protagonist is overwhelmed by the chaotic or irrational nature of his environment"

- born in June 6, 1918 died February 24, 2002
- producer, dramatist, journalist, adaptor and translator, critic, academic scholar, and professor of drama
- wrote one of the most influential texts in the 60s
Waiting for Godot

Two men who are waiting for a man named Godot. After a few events, a person tells them they are a messenger from Godot and he will not be here today but definitely tomorrow. So they decided to leave, but they instead stay. So tomorrow comes, and almost the same plot happens but a little tweaked. When the messenger comes again, he insists that this was his first time meeting the guys but says the same message. The two men, say they are going to leave but once again, the curtains falling they wait for Godot.

-shocked the world in 1953
There are many ways to interpret the short synopsis of the show because absurdist plays are usually not supposed to be taken literally.

- It is a metaphor to life; we are given false hope, in which are hopes are never fulfilled

- The amount of time that they had already spent doing this and the amount of time that would do so in the future is unknown, but neither is important because time was meaningless for them

- Metaphorically could represent they are Waiting for God, or waiting for death (Godot isn’t literal)

- They are waiting for something interesting to happen, their lives to finally start
It takes place, in a small flat where the professor, around the age of 60 is expecting a new student. The professor's maid is very worried about his health. As the student arrives, he perceives her as very ignorant and becomes constantly angry with her, as she becomes very quiet and emotionless. As he tears her down, her health becomes a problem. With what once was a minor toothache has developed into her whole body aching. At the end, the professor stabs and kills the pupil. Ending, the maid is greeting a new pupil, taking another circle, starting at the beginning.
Amedee (How to get Rid of it)  Eugene Ionesco

A middle aged couple has not left their home in year. The wife operates a telephone switchboard, and the husband is writing a play but has only written a few lines. In their bedroom lays a corpse, it could be his wife’s lover that he killed when she was having an affair or anyone. But the corpse is growing bigger and larger, eventually growing so large a foot bursts from the bedroom and into their living room threatening the comfort of their home. In the end, as Amedee is trying to get rid of the body by throwing it into the river, he is trapped and entwined with the legs and the body takes them both into the ocean.
Interpretation:

-the corpse could metaphorically represent the power of their past relationships, guilt, the waiting for love, or even death that it grows worse as time goes by.

-In the end perhaps, guilt caught up to him.
Significance:

It teaches that sometimes we must forget and get away from what is easily accepted, and normal. That sometimes we need to be realistic, about our world and what it has become, and if your artistic expression is in the form of metaphors instead of understood statements then feel free to express yourself. It created and impacted the way of thinking, instead of logic and facts but out of personal interpretation and our own individuality. Something that wasn’t very popular at the time. That perhaps not everything is exactly how it looks, that everything has a deeper meaning. It changed what art really could be.
The Chairs

An old man, and an old woman are frantically preparing chairs for invisible guests, in which they are waiting for the explaining of life. It takes place in a post-apocalyptic world and they are the last people on Earth. As they are talking to their invisible guests, their emperor arrives. The orator delivers his speech to the assembled crowd, his physical appearance contradicting the expectations set up in the play earlier. The old couple then commit suicide, jumping out the window into the ocean because life couldn’t get any better, since the world is finally going to hear the man’s revelation about the meaning of life. In the end we learn the orator is deaf, and has no clue what is going on. So he then leaves through the main door.
Bibliography:

www.samuel-beckett.net/AbsurdEsslin.html

www.theatredatabase.com/20th_century/theatre_of_the_absurd.html

qwiklit.com/2013/08/21/theater-of-the-absurd-15-essential-plays/

cliffsnotes.com/literature/w/waiting-for-godot/critical-essays/samuel-beckett-and-the-theater-of-the-absurd
Link:

stop at 1:52 start at 1:46

Waiting for Godot

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tuU3RrGj3Lc