

BREAK A LEG

BEGINNERS CALL

"Break a leg" is a TV Serie. Per season : 12 X 27 minutes episodes.

"Break a leg" is set in ETO, the European Theater Organization, a theater in Brussels.

"Break a leg" is about theater and is about Europe.

"Break a leg" is absurd, satirical, a bit supernatural, but is played the most earnestly possible.

It's a comedy, but the characters are not aware of it.

"Break a leg" doesn't shy away from emotions, from big and small ideas, isn't afraid to make political and aesthetic stances. But it hides it under comedy and absurdism.

ACT I

A EUROPEAN THEATER

"Break a leg" describes a European theater institution in Brussels.

It doesn't focus on the artists, the actors or the directors, doesn't focus on the people that come and go, but on those who stay: the technicians and the administrative crew.

This crew has more women than men. Almost half of them are, one way or another, part of the LGBTQ+ community.

The main character we follow is Violette, the artistic director, the boss of this theater. Her number two is Marie, who tries relentlessly to take her place (a bit like the coyote in Road Runner, or Iznogoud, "qui veut être Calife à la place du Calife").

Marie's repeated attempts to take Violette's place are in every episode. They are the backbone of the show.

Other storylines: relationships between the theater institution and the different subsidizing entities (Belgian and European); between the theater and different European theater companies (amateurs and professionals); and relationships, loves, hates, between the staff of the institution.

Falsely episodic

All episodes of "Break a leg" are stand-alone, but they mimic a serialized TV series. Each episode begins with a "Previously, on Break a leg" and finishes with a "Next time, on Break a leg".

But the images in the "Previously" were never in past episodes; and (as it was done in "Arrested development") the images in the "Next time" are never seen in subsequent episodes.

Normal episodes

In "normal episodes", there are a number of parallel storylines where all the main characters participate (a bit like "Parks and recreation" or an Aaron Sorkin's TV show's episode).

Special episodes

On average, there will be a "special" episode every four episodes.

Examples:

- An episode from the point of view of only one of our characters.
- An episode told backwards.
- An homage to "Noises off": a play seen through its behind the scenes.
- A bottle episode, set in a cupboard.
- An homage to "Birdman": an episode done entirely in one shot.
- Episodes that are homages to Shakespeare, Tchekhov, Commedia del Arte, Pinter, etc.
- A false documentary.

Our goal is the same as in James Joyce's "Ulysses" or special episodes of "The Simpson": to change the style to explore new aspects of our TV show, new aspects of its universe and characters.

ACT II

MAIN CHARACTERS

VIOLETTE VAN ESPEL

Violette is the artistic director of ETO (European Theater Organization). She's the boss of the place.

She's Belgian. Her mother is Flemish, her father, Walloon.

Violette's parents are low-level civil servants, Catholics, very square. They are kind, loving and try to be supportive. But they never understood their two children. They were anguished when their first son, Gregory, came out as gay and opened a drag-queen bar, and when their second child, Violette, wanted to become an actress.

Violette studied acting but at the same time, to reassure her parents, she got a diploma in commercial engineering.

Violette is fluent in Flemish, French, and English. She had an on and off career as an actress in all three languages, which is pretty rare in Belgium.

She has reached her forties, an age where all actresses have less work. Flemish theater people thought that she was a star in the French-speaking part and that she was unavailable for them; they tended not to call her for work. And the same, in reverse, goes with the French-speaking theater people.

The result was that she became jobless. She was on the verge of losing her unemployment. The French-speaking and Flemish-speaking Communities' bureaucrats were trying to find a bilingual Belgian artistic director for ETO, with strong links to the theater. They offered the job to Violette. She had no choice but to accept.

She is never anxious about her professional life. She's competent, works seriously, she's good at what she does, but she's never felt stressed by it. Even when she was acting, Violette always felt that her private life was more important than her professional life. Maybe because her private life is always a bit off the rails.

She was married to Jeremy, an Irish banker. They have three children.

We never see Jeremy, or her children, in the series. We just see Violette phoning him, and trying desperately and clumsily to win him back.

As most of her family, she has a strange metabolism: she can stay awake for long stretches of time; she can drink alcohol but, after a few minutes, it's completely absorbed and there isn't even a trace of it in her blood; she can forget to eat for a day or two, but can also eat a lot without gaining a gram.

Violette swears, sometimes in French, sometimes in Flemish. But she swears with a low voice, for herself. She always mixes rude words with childish words.

MARIE DURANT

Marie Durant is a 37-year-old French woman. She has studied management in London and has worked for a few cultural organizations, in planning and financing.

She was first offered Violette's position. But because of late-time Belgian political intrigue and fights between Flemish and French-speaking ministries, it was decided that the head of ETO *had* to be a Belgian national.

Marie had already given her notice at her previous job. She had no choice than to accept the offer of being number two of ETO, to be the Administrative Director, under Violette's supervision.

Marie has a sincere love for the theater but let's face it: she doesn't understand what it is, theater. She views it just as a product or as entertainment.

Marie is a great mother for her two children, a loving wife for a lovely young British woman called Joanna. Marie is a gentle and kind soul. She's the sweetest and the most balanced person in the theater.

Apart from her obsession for Violette... Whom she wants to replace.

She considers Violette as her mortal enemy and would do anything to bring her down.

IZABELLA BOGDA

Izabella Bogda is Polish, 42 years old. She's in charge of public relations at ETO.

Izabella was born in Cracow, in a family of medical doctors (her parents but also her siblings, all of them are doctors). She was a rebellious child and teenager. At 18, she left home to enlist in the army.

After the army, she's been a hacker and then a computer safety expert in New York, a salesperson for a distribution multinational, has lived homeless in Spain, has been a manager in a Czech financial firm. She's been married twice with men and once with a woman, she has lived on three continents and has had every fertility treatment known to man but never got pregnant.

Sometimes, she tries to tell stories from her past. But it's too complicated, even for herself. After a few sentences, she mixes people and places and finally gives up with a forced smile.

She's always been obsessed with arts and artists, and always liked the theater. But she

doesn't understand theater from within. Even while working in it, she still keeps a spectator's point of view.

She's quite good at her job:

Like all seasoned sales-person, she's used to being answered "no". Even after a rebuttal, she carries on, against all the odds.

TAMSIN SPARROW

Tamsin Sparrow is 25. She's from Manchester. She's the secretary of ETO.

She's lovely, a bit overweight, very self-conscious.

She always tries to hide how intelligent, competent and efficient she is. Not only because she came from a blue-collar background and was bullied as a kid because of her intelligence but also because she has a sweet tooth for shallow things, glossy magazines, fashion, gossip press.

She has a bit of a Superman complex. She doesn't want to show who she really is (a very bright young woman) but tries to make people believe she's something else (a dumb and shallow secretary).

She learns languages very fast. After only six months in Brussels, she has picked up French and can talk a little Flemish. She's fluent in Gaelic and German and has strong notions in Arabic, Hebrew, and Italian.

She doesn't hesitate to use colloquialisms and slangs from all over the UK and even the USA, but she does it knowingly, ironically.

Being the only native English speaker in the ETO, she sees herself as the Protector of her mother tongue. She is shocked, even horrified, when other employees sometimes butcher the English language.

She never corrects them but rolls her eyes. Nobody notices it, except Marie, who prides herself to speak perfect English and feels miffed each time Tamsin does that to her.

Tamsin falls in love with men totally out of her reach: gays, sports addicts, workaholics, idiots, star fuckers, men that don't even look at her.

In the ETO, she fell in love with Jeroen, who fake-married her so she wouldn't have problems staying in Belgium after the Brexit - well, *he* thinks the marriage is fake, but *she's* not convinced at all.

As most obsessive person, she's a collector, on the verge of being a hoarder. For the moment, she has collected photographs of Jeroen. Hundreds of photos of him, hanging on the walls of her small apartment.

CLAUDIA RODRIGUES

Claudia Rodrigues is a 32-year-old Portuguese woman. She's ETO's senior technician.

She's a seasoned theater technician. She first worked in different small, then big theaters in Portos. She lives now in Brussels and works for the ETO.

Her technical knowledge is deep and thorough.

She's small, thin, more boyish than really gender-fluid. She's a lesbian. She has had long-term relationships but, before moving to Brussels, she had a bad break-up. She's currently single.

A few weeks before the opening of the ETO, six months before the events of episode 1, she came to Brussels with her colleague Yegor. She made a pact with him: she was going to hide that she's fluent not only in Portuguese but also in Russian, French, and English. And Yegor would do as if, besides Swedish and Russian, he just spoke very poor English - when in fact he's fluent not only in English but also in Portuguese, Italian, and Spanish. Their goal is to avoid lengthy and annoying conversations with the artists and the administrative staff of ETO.

YEGOR MELNIKOV

Yegor Melnikov is 27 years old. He's the junior technician of ETO.

Yegor comes from an old Russian theater family. Amongst his ancestors, there were actors, technicians, two theater directors, and a since forgotten theater writer that had been a sworn enemy of Tchekhov.

Yegor left Russia for Sweden, with his parents, when he was four years old. He came back to Russia, to study, then to work. He was a technician, in light, sound and even worked in set design, for a few big theaters of Moscow, Sint-Petersburg and then Lisbon. In Lisbon, he met Claudia.

He worked for her. They hit it on. They became professional pals.

When she was offered a job in the ETO, in Brussels, she asked him to come with her.

He doesn't have Claudia's experience, but he's inventive, fast, full of ideas. They complete each other very well.

Yegor is good with computers and electronics. He has a thorough knowledge of theater and its History. He has an extensive culture in all kinds of domains, especially for a young man of his age. He never showcases his culture.

He's fluent in English, as in many languages, a fact that he hides at the theater. To talk a clumsy English, he takes his inspiration in Yoda.

He's very political. He's anguished about the future of humanity and the ecosystem of earth. He's involved in a lot of alternative groups, all over the world and the internet. He wants to change the world.

One night, a bit drunk, he will sleep with Tamsin...

NICOLE LINETTI

Nicole Linetti is 56 years old. She's the accountant of the ETO.

She was born a boy, on the name "Nicolas Linetti", in a peasant's family of Puglia. She was bullied and cast aside by the other boys and by her own family. She fled when she was fifteen for Rome.

She lived in the streets for two years, begging and stealing. By chance, she met a man, an actor whose name she keeps secrets. He was her on and off boyfriend, and also a sort of patron. He gave her shelter, forced her to resume her education, and even paid for her first gender-alternating operations. All that while he was having an international movie-star career, a family with children and went to church every Sunday.

Nicole studied accounting. From the beginning of her career, she worked in theaters, where a transgender person can work without too much fuss.

Nicole has seen a lot of bad events in her life. She doesn't trust people, tends to see the worse in them.

She always thinks that at any given moment she could be attacked, or robbed, or betrayed.

She's very fond of Violette. But not to the point to openly confront Marie. She doesn't know who is going to be her boss in the future.

She's not very good at her job but is very good at hiding it and make other people do the work at her place. In ETO, Jeroen takes most of her workload.

JEROEN DEKEYZER

Jeroen Dekeyzer is Dutch. He's 25 years old.

He's big, athletic, gorgeous-looking – the beauty of a young Rutger Hauer or Jeroen Krabbe.

He can seem stupid but is not. He has studied finance and law. And in secrecy, he's a very

gifted playwright.

All women (and a lot of men) want to have sex with him. But he is just looking for a soulmate.

When he falls in love, he becomes shy, self-conscious. In some cases, emotions overflow him to the point that he can be abrasive.

He tries very hard to be a good person. He always tries to help, without thinking of the consequence. That's how he married Tamsin, the secretary of ETO, to help her stay in Belgium after the Brexit.

He can be gloomy at times. He sincerely believes that in less than twenty years, it will be the end of capitalism at best, of the human race at worse. He doesn't do anything against it: he believes it's much too late for that.

This pessimism is the primary source of his writing.

Another reason for his gloomy attitude and tone: he comes from a family of undertakers, in Utrecht. He has their stiff and stilted demeanor.

He's not obsessed by death. He's just familiar with it, since his childhood.

He has an in-depth knowledge of very precise subjects: trains, Holland's water system, Pornstars names (just their names), Japanese and Nigerian literature, contemporary music, hunting dogs, etc. Usually, he's not very talkative. But if he has a reason to delve into one of his pet subjects, he can go into a long rant, filled with facts and numbers.

ACT III

TONE

"Break a leg" is a comedy, but it doesn't chase after the laughter.

A very dry humor. No gags every two lines. Very few one-liners.

Our humor comes mainly from the characters, the situations and from the absurd poetry of bureaucracy.

Ghosts and genre

We use genres in "Break a leg", never as a plot device, only as absurd parts of the setting.

Ghosts are an example of that.

There are three ghosts in the theater, the ghosts of the actors who died on stage, in the nineteen-seventies and -eighties.

Those ghosts appear and disappear, but they never change the course of the plot. Some people, the ones who understand what theater is, see those ghosts. But they never question their existence and are only mildly surprised by their presence.

In some episodes, there are elements from other genres: spy novels, horror, science fiction, crime novels, etc. And our characters always react to it the same way: not very surprised or bewildered.

Nothing surprises you anymore when you work in theater.

Over the top, under the top

What has been said about genre is true about the general tone of the series.

A lot of events in our show are extraordinary, but our characters react as if they were everyday events.

Our characters themselves are all pretty special people. But they are oblivious to their specialness.

LGBTQ+

We address the LGBTQ+ issues simply by... Not addressing them. At least, not in the workplace.

We have two gay characters, one transgender, one bisexual, one gender fluid, but their

gender or sexuality does not define them. They are just people working there, who happen to have a specific gender or sexuality and that's it.

Which is generally the way those issues are generally handled in the theater as a workplace.

ACT IV

STYLE

The filming of "Break a leg" is inspired by documentaries: three or more hand-held cameras, "natural" light, hard cuts editing, etc.

But it is not a mockumentary, like "Spinal tap", "Parks and recreation" or "C'est arrivé près de chez vous".

No interviews, no constant zooms, no looking in the lens.

Everything is done to favor the acting.

We'll use the classical method in these kinds of shows: a few takes where the actors say the dialogs to the commas; then a few takes where they improvise.

We also do long walk-and-talk, where we go from set to the other in a continuous shot, as it was done in "Birdman". We do it for the same reason than in the film: theater!...

"Théâtre, théâtre, théâtre !..."

CURTAIN CALL

We, creators of "Break a leg" have a profound love for the theater.
But it can also exasperate us from time to time.

We, creators of "Break a leg", believe in Europe, in the CEE. We think that the last 74 years of European peace is a product of these institutions.
But very frequently, they also exasperate us.

In "Break a leg", we express this love, belief, and exasperation.