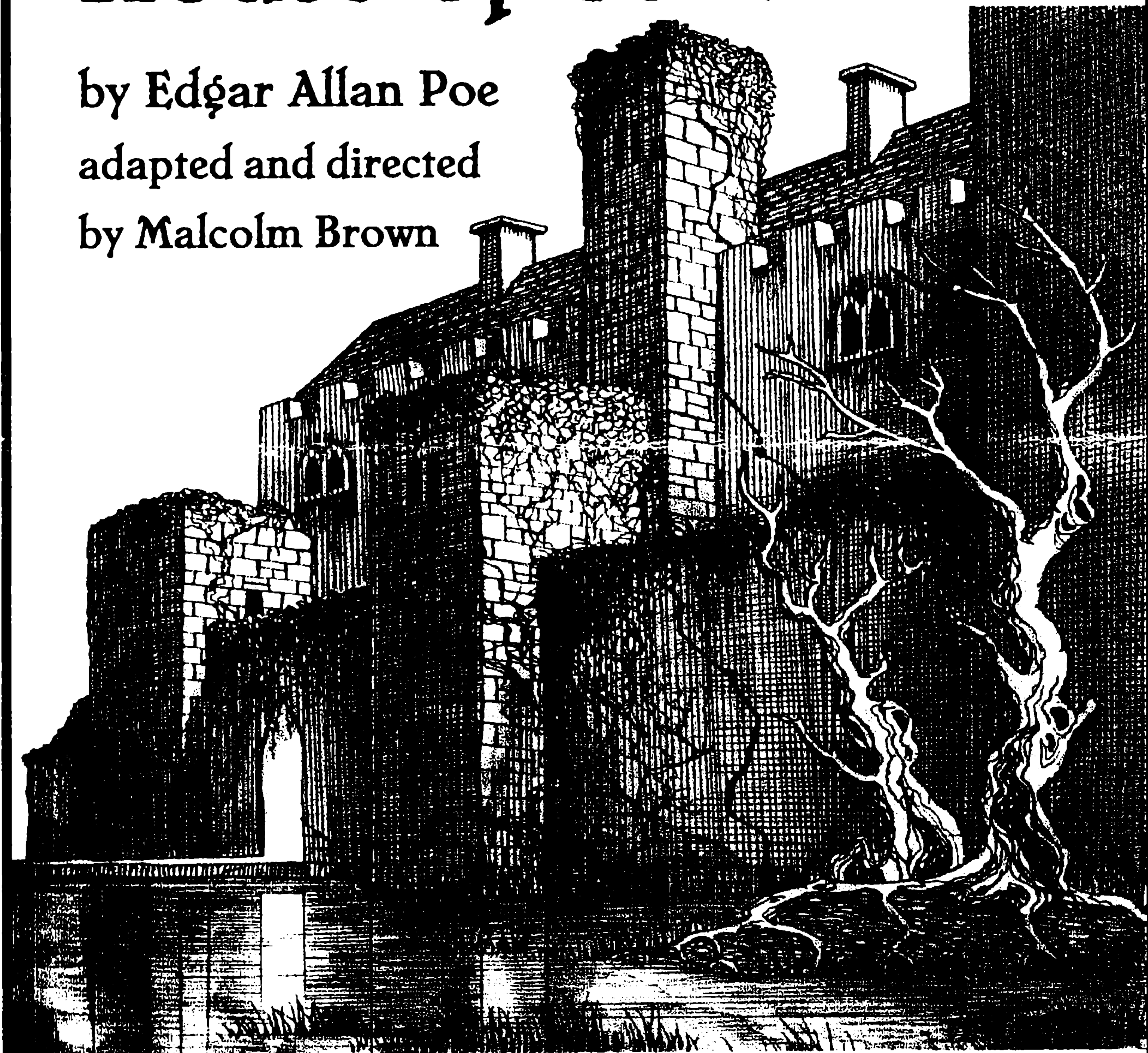




**LEEDS ARTS
CENTRE**

The Fall of the House of Usher

by Edgar Allan Poe
adapted and directed
by Malcolm Brown



Leeds Civic Theatre

Wednesday to Saturday, 19th to 22nd May, 2004

at 7.30.p.m.

Plot Summary

The House of Usher, an ancient, decaying mansion, is home to Roderick and his twin sister Madeline - the last of the Usher family. When Roderick invites his old school friend to stay with them he sets in motion an increasingly horrific sequence of events, involving guilt, terror, obsession, drugs, catalepsy and madness, which leads inevitably to the fall of the House of Usher.

Stage adaptation

The Fall of the House of Usher is a short story which uses the elements of the gothic tale to create a revealing insight into the disintegration of the human mind. It would make a very short play if transferred to the stage as it is, so I took the characters and framework of the story, then looked to other works by Poe for material to expand its themes and ideas. This was not difficult, as much of Poe's writing deals with similarly macabre obsessions: *The Premature Burial*, *The Oval Portrait*, *Morella*, *The Cask of Amontillado*, *The Tell-Tale Heart* and many others provided material which could be woven into the tale of the doomed House of Usher without destroying its essential atmosphere and effect.

In the original story, Roderick Usher's friend is the unnamed narrator, so for the dramatisation I simply gave him Poe's name - Edgar. Roderick's sister, Madeline, makes only a brief appearance before the climax of the story: "the Lady Madeline ... passed slowly through a remote portion of the apartment, and, without having noticed my presence, disappeared." Madeline's role needed to be enlarged, so the play begins with the diagnosis of her illness, and establishes her ambiguous relationship with her brother. When Edgar arrives, Madeline's shifting feelings contribute to the motivation for Roderick's actions later in the play.

The bulk of the dialogue is derived directly from Poe's writings, as is the poetry (apart from the pieces by Shakespeare). *The Haunted Palace* and *The Mad Trist* have been retained from the original tale, where they are used to heighten the sense of dread, and echo the themes of madness and sexual guilt, while the stories concerning the Usher ancestors are all drawn from other tales by Poe to reinforce the inevitable doom of the cursed family.

Malcolm Brown

Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Poe was born in Boston on 19th January, 1809. His parents were touring actors, but both died before he was three years old, and he was fostered by John Allan, and baptised Edgar Allan Poe. In 1826 he entered the University of Virginia, but was expelled after one term for gambling debts.

Poe enlisted in the US army as Edgar A. Perry, when he had already published his first book: *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (1827). He attended West Point Military Academy, but was dismissed in 1831 for "gross neglect of duty" - he had appeared on parade totally naked except for a white belt and gloves. His fellow cadets contributed the funds for the publication of *Poems by Edgar A. Poe - Second Edition* (1831).

Poe took up residence in Baltimore with his widowed aunt, Maria Clemm, and her young daughter, Virginia, and turned to fiction as a means of supporting himself. In 1832 the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier* published five of his stories - all comic or satiric - and in 1833, *MS. Found in a Bottle* won a \$50 prize given by the *Baltimore Saturday Visitor*. Poe, his aunt and Virginia moved to Richmond in 1835, where he became editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* and in 1836 he married the thirteen-year-old Virginia.

Poe published fiction in the *Messenger*, but most of his contributions were serious analytical and critical reviews which earned him respect as a critic. His contributions increased the circulation of the magazine, but they offended its owner, who also took exception to Poe's drinking, and the January 1837 issue of the *Messenger* announced his withdrawal as editor.

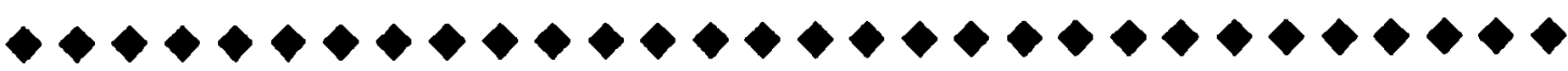
Poe sought to establish himself as a force in literary journalism, first in New York City (1837), then in Philadelphia (1838-44), and again in New York (1844-49). He succeeded in formulating influential literary theories and in demonstrating his mastery of highly musical poems and short prose narratives. Both forms, he argued, should aim at "a certain unique or single effect". In 1845 he achieved immediate fame with his poem *The Raven*, and among his most celebrated stories were *Ligeia* (which Poe considered his finest tale - 1838), *The Fall Of The House Of Usher* (1840), *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (the world's first detective story - 1841), and *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1843).

Virginia died in 1847, after which Poe wrote little more, and in 1848 he attempted suicide by drinking laudanum. In 1849 he returned to Baltimore, where he died on 7th October, after being found semiconscious and delirious, from a mixture of alcohol, heart failure and epilepsy. His epitaph was a quotation from his most famous poem: "Quoth the Raven nevermore".

Cast

RODERICK USHER	David Mallinson
MADELINE, his sister	Joanna Gordon
EDGAR, his friend	Chris Hudson
DOCTOR	Edwin Barraclough

ADAPTED, DESIGNED AND DIRECTED
by Malcolm Brown

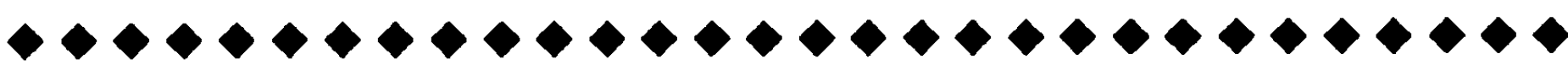


The scene is set in Roderick's studio in the House of Usher.
The time is the early nineteenth century.



At the start of his tale of *The Fall of the House of Usher*
Poe quotes the following two lines of poetry:

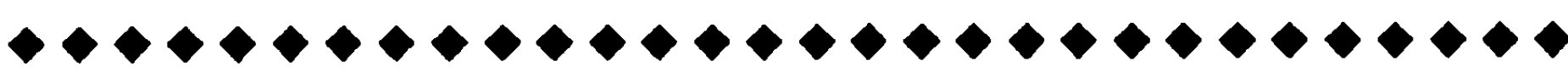
Son coeur est un luth suspendu;
Sitôt qu'on le touche il resonance.
De Beranger



Notes

Catalepsy (from the Greek *katalepsis* - a seizure) is a form of epilepsy marked by paralysis instead of fits.

Opium (from the Greek *opos* - juice) is derived from the milky juice in the unripe seed pods of the opium poppy. A tincture (solution in alcohol) of opium is called **laudanum**, and In the 1800s it was commonly used to promote sleep and alleviate pain. Its effects upon the body range from analgesia (insensitivity to pain) to narcosis (depressed physiological activity leading to stupor).



There will be one interval of twenty minutes
during which the theatre bar will be open

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ASSISTANT PRODUCTION MANAGER	Valerie Horton
STAGE MANAGER	Martyn Drake
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER	Shirley Broadbent
SET CONSTRUCTION	Tony Nelson
PROPERTIES	Monica Brown
LIGHTING	Peter Waddicor
SOUND RECORDING	Jim Marshall
SOUND OPERATION	Michael Wood
PROMPT	Joyce King
FRONT OF HOUSE MANAGER	Zoe Freedman
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Civic Theatre

Theatre Manager	Steven Cartwright
Assistant Manager	Vivien Simpson
Chief Technician and Lighting	Peter Waddicor
Technicians	Sandy Clark, David Simpson
Box office	Margaret Rook, Sylvia Gooding

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