UBU: KARANDA’s First Act

Posted on

Brandon Ingram, actor, theater practitioner, and founder of KARANDA.

KARANDA, a new Sri Lankan creative company founded by actor and theater practitioner Brandon Ingram, will make its debut with UBU, running from November 5 to 8, 2026, at Trace City, Maradana.

Words: Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane. Photography: Jonathan Anthony.

The Sinhala word KARANDA means “to do,” reflecting an ethos of action and creation. In keeping with this spirit, Brandon has embarked on his debut production under the KARANDA banner with UBU, bringing a 130-year-old idea of absurdity into the world of social media, shifting identities, and blurred realities – while asking audiences to look, laugh, and perhaps recognize something of themselves along the

way.

Looking for an existing work that could speak to the global political climate, Alfred Jarry’s Ubu Roi, which debuted in Paris in 1896, emerged as an obvious candidate because of its deliberately exaggerated and absurd treatment of power.

However, the language, situations, and references belonged to another era. Brandon decided to retain the baseline concept and discard almost everything else.

Thus, UBU draws from the absurdity of Jarry’s work, taking its central idea – the absurdity of political power, corruption, and unchecked greed vis-à-vis human behavior – and rebuilding it for an audience living in a very different kind of absurd world.

Brandon Ingram, and Tehani Chitty.

Tehani Chitty, Veenadari Jayakody, and Niroshi Perera.

Ruvin De Silva and Tehani Chitty.

What emerged is an invented production, created collectively by Brandon and the ten-member cast. The actors have contributed to the script, developed their characters, and helped construct the world in which the story takes place. That world is The Feed. While Jarry’s story is set in Poland, Brandon’s fictional nation is The Feed, a nation deliberately constructed around the behaviors and structures of contemporary “online” life. It has its own political system, manifesto, religious and philosophical dimensions, and social structures. Its name, however, comes from

something much more familiar – the endless digital stream, or feeds, through which modern life is increasingly filtered.

The idea developed during the extensive world-building process behind the production. Brandon wanted to create a place that was recognizably a nation, but one that reflected how people now exist simultaneously in the physical and digital worlds. It is a world where people are constantly looking at screens, even when surrounded by other people.

The production deliberately mirrors the experience of moving through social media. Rather than following a conventional linear narrative, scenes move almost like reels – one fragment giving way to another, sometimes abruptly, sometimes provocatively.

It is a clever structural choice because it does not merely talk about the digital age. It attempts to make the audience experience something of its rhythm.

Brandon is interested in how digital existence has complicated the borders that once gave people a relatively clear sense of belonging to a particular culture, society, or geographic place. The internet has given everyone access to everyone else. When identities are constructed online, when opinions are shaped by algorithms, when political narratives travel across borders, and when engagement can become more valuable than accuracy, the distinction between what is real and what is performed becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. UBU explores that uncertainty through its characters and its world.

So, what does UBU intend to deliver? Brandon is clear that he does not see theater as a vehicle for preaching. Instead, he describes the work as reflective. And then there is the other essential ingredient – entertainment.

Brandon comes from a family of entertainers and places considerable value on the simple pleasure of making an audience enjoy itself. It is entertainment first. Reflection follows.

That balance may be one of the production’s most interesting propositions. The audience does not necessarily have to agree with an argument or arrive at a prescribed conclusion. It can laugh at the absurdity, recognize something uncomfortable, and then decide what to make of it.

If UBU sounds unconventional on paper, it is because it is deliberately designed to be so.

The production does not move through a traditional linear structure. It breaks familiar theatrical conventions, using live performance and multimedia to create an environment in which the boundaries between stage, screen, and audience experience become fluid. Even the choice of venue reflects this approach.

Veenadari Jayakody

Tehani Chitty, Veenadari Jayakody, Ruvin de Silva, Nethma Mettananda, Nabeel Nooramith, and Niroshi Perera.

Brandon is not staging UBU in a conventional theater. The space at Trace City has been specifically configured for the production and becomes part of the world itself. That is central to KARANDA’s approach. The company is not simply presenting a play. It is constructing an experience. And this is where Jarry’s original provocation remains relevant. Ubu Roi was notorious for challenging the expectations of its time. Brandon’s response is not to reproduce that provocation in nineteenth-century terms, but to ask what would be provocative now.

One of the more unusual aspects of the production is the degree to which the cast has been involved in creating the world. Brandon divided elements of the world-building among the actors. Some explored what people in The Feed would wear. Others considered its politics, religion, philosophy, and even the existence of divine entities. He provided the framework rather than prescribing every detail. What surprised him was the degree of synchronicity that emerged. Ideas developed independently by different actors began complementing one another, giving the fictional world an internal logic of its own.

Having worked on the project since June, Brandon was seeing the various pieces come together for the first time – the characters, the world, the physical space, and the performance when the team completed its full run-through of UBU. Only then, he says, did he realize that he genuinely liked the show.

KARANDA is an ambitious venture. The company comprises three broad areas: performance, learning, and, eventually, publishing. At its heart is a belief in Sri Lankan talent and the possibility of building creative work here that can engage confidently with the world.

For decades, creative practitioners in Sri Lanka have often looked outward for validation or opportunity. Brandon wants to reverse that direction. He argues that Sri Lanka does not need to imitate what has already proven successful elsewhere to participate in the global creative economy. It needs to understand what it has of its own – its history, traditions, experiences, and contemporary thinking – and find ways to make them relevant now.

The question is not whether Sri Lankan creativity can become international. It is whether Sri Lanka can become sufficiently confident in its own creative voice to allow the international audience to come looking. For Brandon, that means contemporizing what belongs to Sri Lanka rather than simply reproducing Western models of success. It is an ambitious proposition, particularly for a new company.

But ambition seems to be part of the design.

Brandon has been acting since school and won the All-Island Best Actor Award for Shakespeare in 1999. His professional journey in English-language theater spans almost two decades, beginning with Tracy Holsinger’s Chatroom and continuing through work with directors including Feroz Kamardeen, Jerome de Silva, Juanita Bealing, Jith Peiris, and Arun Welandawe-Prematilleke.

He has also been involved with Mind Adventures Theatre Company, including its acclaimed immersive production PARAYA. His experience has given him an appreciation not only for theater as an art form but also for the challenges facing the people who make it.

Brandon’s long-term ambition is to help create a culture in which acting and the arts can stand alongside professions such as medicine, law, and engineering as viable careers. A considerable goal for a company taking its first steps. Brandon admits that he has a full-time career that he loves and that, at times, it has been easy to hide behind it. He registered KARANDA more than a year before anything happened with it. Then came a moment when he decided it was time to stop waiting. And so, after years of acting, learning, and observing the theater around him, he finally began.

UBU is therefore more than KARANDA’s first production. It is a statement of intent.

UBU takes a play born of the absurdity of nineteenth-century politics and places it within a world of feeds, screens, algorithms, and fractured identities. It asks audiences to laugh at power, question perception, and perhaps recognize the strange ways in which everyday life has itself become a performance.

UBU; November 5 to 8, 2026

November 5 and 6 – Time: 7.30pm,

November 7 and 8 (weekend matinees) – Time: 3.30pm and evening shows –

Time: 7:30pm;

Venue: Bay 07, Trace Expert City, Maradana

Ticket prices: Starting at Rs.3,500

(karanda.lk or via WhatsApp:

+94 74 338 8800).

Ruvin De Silva, and Brandon Ingram.