

'The Maids' and 'Deathwatch'

by Jean Genet
directed by Strat Mastoris
20-27 June 2009

Jean Genet: illegitimate child abandoned to an orphanage, thief, homosexual prostitute, jailbird, poet, author, leading playwright of the Theatre of the Absurd. This fascinating man was himself fascinated by the ritualistic struggles of outcasts and their oppressors, which he had experienced first-hand and knew well. Both 'The Maids' and 'Deathwatch' are plays about people who are trapped, and who try to find ways to overcome their imprisonment. Physical escape is not possible, so the charac-

ters employ psychological means to assert their existence.

I knew a little of Genet, though I had seen neither play performed, but I was intrigued by the common theme when I read them and was keen to put them on together at the NVT. Once the cast started rehearsals, we were all bowled over by the power of the writing,

and we keep finding new layers of meaning and characterisation in the text.



Deathwatch - L-R Jack Bridgewater as Maurice, Sam Parsons as Green Eyes and Nik Hedges as Le Franc

Photo by Strat Mastoris

In 'The Maids', two housemaids, sisters in their thirties, have been forced by economic and class reasons

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'Mademoiselle Y'

directed by Tamar Daly and Mike Stubbs
8-11 July 2009

'Mademoiselle Y' is an innovative and playful collaboration between artistic director Mike Stubbs and dancer Tamar Daly, which uses drama, dance and voice to explore the tensions within Strindberg's play 'The Stronger' and to test the elasticity of live performance.



Photo by Strat Mastoris

Strindberg's original one act play, a mediated dance performance by Daly and a vocal adventure by Nicolette Corcoran, propels the audience into world of tensions: dance v drama, traditional v experimental, tragic v comic, vocal v visual, shade v light.

Described by Mike as "a jewel of theatri-

cal drama", *The Stronger* consists of a single conversation between two women, Madame X and Miss Y. An impromptu meeting in a bar leads to an unusual dialogue in which Madame X accuses Miss Y of having an affair with her husband. Like many of Strindberg's plays, *The*

Stronger is a psychological trial of strength in which two characters are brought together in an immediate moment of opposition.

Tamar, who has a decade of experience in performing and making dance in both France and Israel, uses *The Stronger* as a starting point for her performance, which combines movement, video projections and electronic sound to create

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into the employ of Madame, a bourgeois woman in her twenties. They are dependent on Madame, they envy and hate her, but they also want to be her, and they hate themselves both for envying and for wanting to be her. I have shamelessly appropriated Lyn Fernee and Sarah Charsley, who gave such haunting performances as the sisters in 'Five Kinds of Silence', for the maids, and Anna Bolwell, last seen in 'It's a Wonderful Life', as Madame.

The protagonists in 'Deathwatch' are physically imprisoned inside the stone blocks of a gaol cell. Status is conferred by the severity of a man's crime, and Green Eyes is a condemned murderer awaiting execution. Tensions mount as the other two cell-mates jockey for position and attempt to usurp Green Eyes' authority within the cell. I have been lucky enough to work with Nik Hedges, who hasn't acted for NVT since a stunning performance as Oberon in 'A Midsummer

Night's Dream' several years ago. Plus, I have snapped up Sam Parsons and Jack Bridgewater, who were the brothers in 'True West' last season, and Mark Green, last seen in the movement piece 'Beauty Within', as the jail Guard.

The action in both plays is very constrained: 'The Maids' in a bedroom and 'Deathwatch' in the much more constricted setting of a prison cell. The characters are locked in close proximity as the emotional pressure cooker heats up. This isn't the theatre of 'alarums' and tempests and rushing about carrying spears. Theatre can obviously do these things, but I think that what theatre does best is to provide a close-up, fly-on-the-wall view of human emotions and interactions.

These two plays are classics of twentieth century theatre, and it is a real privilege to be able to stage them here at the NVT.

Strat Mastoris

(Mademoiselle Y' continued from page 1)

a powerful theatrical landscape. Her unique and playful style of experimental theatre is an exploration of what it's like to be on stage without speaking. Her performance shows how movement can give voice to those known to be silent, including the audience. Mike says: "When I first saw Tamar perform, it was like watching an abstract painting being created."

Mike is delighted to have the opportunity to work with such a multi-talented cast, including Gayle Dudley (Madame X) last seen at the NVT in "Dinner" and Christine Gelder, making her acting debut at the NVT as Mademoiselle Y. Singer Nicolette Corcoran will be writing original songs, using live electronic looping to layer her voice into a rich texture of vocals.

Through its fusion of dance, drama and song, Mademoiselle Y offers something for everyone, and gives its audience an exciting insight into this performance medium.

July newsletter dates

Final copy date: Monday 22 June
Printing: Thursday 2 July
Stuffing & posting: Weds. 8 July

Ticket requests

To: The Box Office Manager, New Venture Theatre,
Bedford Place, Brighton BN1 2PT
Please reserve for me _____ tickets for

'The Maids' & 'Deathwatch'

Saturday 20 June to Saturday 27 June – 7.45 pm
Matinee on Sunday 21 June at 2.30 pm
(No performance on Monday)

Tickets: £7.00 (£6.00 Friends)
Final Friday & Saturday evenings: £8.50 (£7.50 Friends)

NAME: _____ Membership number _____
ADDRESS: _____
PHONE _____

To: The Box Office Manager, New Venture Theatre,
Bedford Place, Brighton BN1 2PT
Please reserve for me _____ tickets for

'Mademoiselle Y'

Wednesday 8 July to Saturday 11 July – 7.45 pm
Matinee on Saturday 11 July at 2.30 pm

Tickets: £7.00 (£6.00 Friends)
Friday & Saturday evenings: £8.50 (£7.50 Friends)

NAME: _____ Membership number _____
ADDRESS: _____
PHONE _____

NVT awards

As you will know from the AGM last year and previous newsletters, we are planning to start next season with a social event - The NVT awards. For this event to work we need you to be involved. In the next newsletter there will be a list of awards and productions that are eligible for nomination - 2008/09 season. I am sure you will remember the character / actor that made the most impact. But we want to ensure those who work away in the background are recognised as well. So please remember to nominate off stage, development and organisation people; without whom the productions would not happen either.

Below is a list of the suggested awards, if you think any have been missed please let me know.

Ian Black

Administration Director

Best Production

Best Direction

Best Set Design

Best Lighting Design

Best Newcomer on Stage

Best Actor / Performer

Best FoH / Box Office Person

Most Innovative Production

Most Effective Back Stage Team

Most Active Member

Most Helpful Member

Best Performance outside a production

Best Sound Design

Best Poster Design

AUDITION NOTICE:

‘The Entertainer’ by John Osborne

Audition dates: NVT, Sunday 28 June 2 pm

and Tuesday 30 June 8 pm

Look out for the audition notice with this newsletter.

Now something about the play.

Osborne’s style, powerful, raw and compelling, draws us deep into Archie Rice’s world, a fading musical hall performer trying to keep his world together at any cost. Set in 50’s Britain with the country in an unwanted war in the Suez. With his son Mick captured and held hostage,

his money run out and no backing for a new show, we watch Archie’s’ increasingly desperate attempts to survive.

As well as actors and production team I will be needing musicians as well.

Jerry Lyne 01273 446574 / 07762916888

jerry.lyne@btinternet.com

The Festival: A big thanks!

The Festival is over and it was a massive success for NVT. Festen, directed by Pat Boxhall, won an Argus Angel Award immediately and filled most seats every night, and the Stoppard Double Bill, directed by Delorean Groves and Bill "Buff" Orpington, sold out every night.

As usual both productions had a massive support from volunteers working behind the scenes. Some of them so dedicated that they spent every night and several days at the theatre, missing almost everything else in the Festival. And whilst it proves difficult to have enough people covering bar and box office during a normal 1 week run, the Festival of course adds additional strain on these 2 areas. This includes the changes to our normal ticket system, as part of the Fringe, and makes Box office work much more complicated and generates more work for managing the bar as well. But we managed! So a massive THANK YOU to all the volunteers helping out and ensuring the productions can go ahead.

We should all be grateful for the effort and time people donate to the theatre, but surprisingly quite a few people, members and non-members, seem to forget that and gave those volunteers a hard time. Members who missed booking tickets in advance were of course disappointed, but that is not a reason to be impolite to anybody working at the theatre and creating unnecessary stress and scenes. Or to even sneak into a performance without paying! The volunteers helping did a great job and deserve respect and friendly words.

A big Thank you to all the people that appreciated the extra efforts during the Festival and acknowledged and thanked people - you kept us going over the weeks!

Ulrike

NVT Production Manager 2009

2009/2010 Season

Some members have asked what is our theme for next season and I usually say there isn't one except we are striving for class writing, variety, challenge and audience appeal.

I'll leave you to judge if we've achieved that.

Mike Stubbs, Artistic Director



		Author	Director
10-17 October	Art	Yasmina Reza	Tim McQuillen-Wright
7-14 November	The Entertainer	John Osborne	Jerry Lyne
5-13 December	The Lying Kind	Anthony Neilson	Ian Black
16-23 January	Heroes	Gérald Sibleyras Translated by Tom Stoppard	Alex Epps
13-20 February	Dancing at Lughnasa	Brian Friel	Gerry McCrudden
27 March - 3 April	The Sea Anchor	Ted Whitehead	Matt Houghton
May Festival (TBA)	Icarus	Ulrike Schiling	Ulrike Schiling
May festival (TBA)	Endgame	Thomas Beckett	Mark Green
19-26 June	A View from a Bridge	Arthur Miller	Mark Wilson
17-24 July	TBA - Pat Lyne	TBA	TBA

Newsletter Poll

Changes to your NVT Newsletter - do you want them?

There have been suggestions about changing the look and delivery of the NVT newsletter. Below are the three options for change that are being considered.

- To deliver the newsletter by email to all members with a registered email address. This would reduce the cost of printing and postage. There would still be a printed version for members without email, NVT promotion and new members.
- To have the newsletter posted on the website for members to download as and when they wish. An email would be sent to confirm the newsletter had been posted. Similar savings to the above option, less email data being sent out.
- To move to the front and back pages in colour. This increases the costs for the printed version, but allows the prominent pages with pictures to be in colour.

Please let us know which of these options you feel would be a good way forward for the NVT newsletter. You can either leave a message on 01273 808353 or email info@newventure.org.uk. Deadline for feedback is Monday 22 June.

Irrespective of these proposals please ensure we have your correct email address as we are using this for other information already - if in doubt please send your up to date email address to info@newventure.org.uk.



'The Real Inspector Hound' and 'After Magritte'

Reviewed by **Barrie Jerram**

The pairing of these two comedies by Tom Stoppard fitted well together; both being examples of absurdist theatre.

After Magritte, the lesser of the two pieces, acted as an appetiser that introduced the audience to Stoppard's style. It demonstrated his clever use of wordplay – puns and all. Like Orton he has the knack of taking an ordinary incident, utilising stylised language and developing it into something bizarre.

In this play the verbal surrealism of the writing matched the visual surrealism found in Magritte's paintings as four people recount the same incident. It demonstrated to comic effect how differently people saw, interpreted and remembered the same event.

Andy Small and Claire Armstrong capably played the couple whose home was invaded by the police in the belief that it is used as a disorderly house. An easy assumption to make considering that Small is discovered wearing long rubber fishing waders, standing on chair looking about to carry out a sexually simulated hanging instead of merely being in a position to change a light bulb. His wife on the other hand has

just been seen giving massage to someone on an ironing board – the someone turns out to be her mother-in-law who has fixation on the works of Magritte extends to her having taken up the tuba. Amanda Urwin-Mann has to be commended for her mastery of this difficult instrument but her performance as the mother seemed a little under par and it is hoped that it developed after the first night.

Darren Cockrill was sufficiently dim as PC Holmes under the command of Tessa Pointing's Inspector Foot - more of her anon.

The second play, cleverly constructed, was a glorious spoof on country house murder mysteries with the theatrical conceit of having two newspaper critics, Moon and Birdboot, watching, commenting and eventually becoming part of the play.

Moon, a second string reviewer, constantly moans about always covering for the leading critic, Higgs, and worries at great length as to whether his position is being undermined by Harrison, the third string. However Birdboot, with a penchant for pretty actresses, waxes lyrically whilst

he fantasises over them. John Adam and Steve Mallen gave good contrasting performances one introverted and paranoid, the other ebullient and comic as tries to reassure that he is happily married and that his dalliances are for professional reasons.

The play that they are watching is a parody of the murder mystery genre that provides a comic gem of exaggerated acting, expertly delivered by a talented cast. Jen Bridges was the bright young thing and friend of Mai Elphinstone's Lady Cynthia. For his second role of the evening Andy Small hammed up the air of mystery as the uninvited stranger whilst Brendan Moore was even more mysterious as the wheelchair bound, long lost cousin.

Each of the evening's two plays contained a performance that stole the show. In Magritte Tessa Pointing was superb as Inspector Foot of the Yard – all blustering and bullying ineptitude. The second play had Peta Taylor gloriously overacting as Mrs Drudge, the charlady. Their timing, body gestures and mugging resulted in two hilarious characterisations.

Barrie Jerram



Guy Burdon has an automobile number plate 667 NVT for sale on certificate, if any NVT members are interested.

Please email on giznwiz@btinternet.com

'FESTEN'

REVIEWED, PHOTOGRAPHED AND HONOURED

One of the meanings of the Danish word Festen is appropriately Festival and this production exceeded its place as a Fringe event – it was worthy of being part of Brighton's main Festival.

The play is a study of the hypocrisy within a large and wealthy family who gather to celebrate the 60th birthday of the head of the family.

It is obvious right from the beginning that there are undercurrents within family life – not the least being the recent suicide of one of his daughters.

During the speeches at the dinner a shocking truth is revealed the eldest son, Christian and its delivery provided a moment of true theatrical magic. What followed were the reactions of the family members to this revelation. The blind eyes, so long turned away, are forced open to devastating effect as the family disintegrates.

One approaches any production that has Pat Boxall at the helm with the highest of expectations and this one did not disappoint. It was a fusion of faultless direction and superb acting. Staging the piece with a large cast, bearing in mind the limited space available, was finely judged. The set was simple yet impressive with its starkness. The long black dining table with subtle overhead lighting dominated and brought to mind a religious comparison – The Last Supper. In fact for this family it would prove to be their last supper as a complete unit. The music used, along with the lighting, created a brooding and eerie atmosphere.

The atmosphere took on a menacing air with the singing of birthday songs as they went from festive jollity to ritualistic chanting. In the programme notes the play is likened to a Greek tragedy and this came out with use of



Photo by Strat Mastoris

The 'Festen' cast with their coveted Argus Golden Angel award

the three servants urging Christian to finish what he had started. They served as a Greek chorus depicting the Furies calling for revenge.

It would be hard to find a better cast as every actor invested their part with an air of naturalism. The many understated performances gave the production its power and provided its audience with a theatrical experience that was riveting throughout.

With such wonderful ensemble playing it is not possible to single out every performance but I would like to make a couple of observations.

Matthew Houghton's Christian was an example of the effectiveness of underplaying – his quiet measured delivery produced a greater shock when he made his revealing accusations. Likewise a controlled

performance from Bob Gilchrist made the father believable as he countered the accusations. The man's affability masked the true monster.

Proof that small roles can also make an impact was provided by Emma Cunliffe as Pia, the maid in her relationship with Christian. Her sensitivity showed the girl to be a truly loving friend and not an exploitive servant. A similar impact was made by Peter Milner as Grandfather on the edge of dementia. It would have been so easy to overplay this role and turn it into a caricature. Again the role received sensitive handling and what emerged was a bewildered Chekhovian figure.

Apologies go to the rest of the cast for not mentioning their performances as do my grateful thanks for an enthralling theatrical experience.

Barrie Jerram

NVT WINS THE ARGUS ANGEL AWARD FOR ITS PERFORMANCE OF 'FESTEN'.

The golden statue indicates the Argus' recognition of excellence during Brighton Festival and Fringe.

Letters and notes

Barry Hewlett-Davies

We all wish a speedy recovery to Barry Hewlett-Davies who is in hospital at the moment - love and support to you and Janet from all your friends at NVT.

Acting Classes

8, 15 and 22 June:
Body awareness - Ulrike Schilling

Whilst many actors focus on learning their lines, they forget what they might be saying with their bodies. During these classes we will be looking at physicality, explore the concept of presence and work with the body in relation to its surroundings.

29 June, 6 13, 20 and 27 July:
The Art and Craft of Performing on Stage...Practical Hints and Tips - Pat Boxall

Pat will be concentrating on the nuts and bolts of stagecraft. Over the five weeks she will be covering basic skills such as talking and listening, spontaneity, moves and voice work.

George Dillon workshop this summer!

George Dillon, who produced and performed in 'The man who was Hamlet' in December at the NVT, will be leading a weekend workshop on the 1st and 2nd of August!

More details will be available online and in the next Newsletter!

For the July production (Mille. Y) we need a data projector for use with a DVD and also a DVD player with surround sound capability. If you have access to these and would be willing to loan them, please let me know. We need them from 28th June to 12th July.

Please contact Mike Stubbs on mikestubbs2000@yahoo.co.uk

Many thanks.

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