

# NVT - we move forward . . .

By Ian Black, Administrative Director

Here we are at the beginning of another season and looking forward to new productions and future development. But we should briefly look back and see how far we have come in the last year.

Since the season started in September we have seen some wonderful productions, commencing with 'A Number' and continuing through our diamond jubilee season to its completion with 'Three Tall Women'. Enjoying the delights of 'Bouncers & Shakers', 'Plays for Coarse Actors', 'Strangers on a Train', 'Frankie says 'Laugh', 'Hedda Gabler', 'Mojo', 'Intimate Encounters' and 'The Anniversary' on the way.

Sadly the season has seen the departure of a number of active members from their roles within the theatre. Penny, who had become synonymous with the bar and front of house, who has departed to Australia for 6 months and Luci, our Box Office supremo, who has taken to child rearing as an easier option.

At the AGM we saw the complete change of Trustees, from the experienced group to a new and unknown

band. Over the next few months it took time and many hours for the new trustees to get to grips with what had to be done - with the valued support of the old guard. Unfortu-



Ian Black

nately, James Newton had to resign due to personal time constraints. But we moved on with an expanded group. This was not to last long as Rob bagged a job in a million and was forced, by time commitment, to resign almost as soon as he started. We soldiered on through the remainder of the season and into the summer months, where refurbishment awaited. The main theatre was stripped out by a small band of workers, led by our Artistic Director, leaving the basic shell for redevelopment that will fit our future needs.

But the summer months brought tidings that were not so bright. Wendy, our company secretary, has been hit with a double whammy of personal problems,

and despite trying to continue, has sadly had to resign her role. Similarly, our Artistic Director has decided that due to work commitments she is unable to continue to commit the time and drive to progress the creative side of the theatre as she would wish. So, sadly she too has decided it would be better to resign her role and step aside for someone else with the time, rather than continue and not achieve the goals and standards she aspires to for our theatre in the future.

I would like to express my thanks to all who have been active in the theatre over the past year; you know who you are. We survive by members donating their time and effort to move us forward, to do the boring menial things that need to be done. Any production needs its supporting people and so does the theatre as a whole.

We have a fair amount of work to do before we can open the main theatre again. Also, we have received notice from the council that the exterior of the theatre needs to be brought up to standard, so we will do this as we must. We have a requirement to install a fire detection system and undertake some changes to the building to meet fire regulations and maintain our licence; so we will do this. But it costs money, much of which is met by our fundraising, to which we owe a thanks to Mike and his team. However, one of the biggest costs is labour. People, who can paint, carry things, use a screw driver and similar complex tools, upholster - or learn to, help build the NVT of

*(continued on page 2)*

**AGM Sunday 30 November**

## We move forward . . .

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the future.

This has the potential sounding gloomy, but unlike the weather it is not. We are well on the way to getting the new season up and running, with auditions and rehearsals starting very soon. To get the remaining refurbishment work done, in addition to the contractors, we need you to use your other skills, whatever they are to help us move forwards and see the NVT ready for the future. You'll be surprised how little work there is to do if we all muck in together.

Enough of the pleas and such like. But truth be told, we are in need of a few key people. So, if you are keen, enthusiastic and willing to make your presence felt, here are the roles you should be considering.

- Box Office Manager
- Front of House / Bar Manager

- Supplies Manager
- Artistic Director
- Company Secretary

As the Annual General Meeting is only a couple of months away, we have decided to hold off on co-opting a new Artistic Director and Company Secretary until the AGM, where the roles will be put to the vote as usual. But please let us know now if you are interested in any of the above roles.

So, let us look to the future, we have a great season lined up. Unfortunately our first planned production has fallen. But will now be replaced by an external hire, due to time constraints in setting up an NVT replacement production. This will be 'What All the Rabbits are Doing', by the Sabotage Theatre Company; hot from Edinburgh.

In addition to the normal productions, acting classes etc. we are trying some new things this season. We have planned two workshops to be held during the first

part of the season. These will be on Stagecraft and Directing - see This Season's Productions below for dates of the first one.

Also we have scheduled Member Meets once a month on a Monday, we hope to see this as an opportunity for members to get together outside the structure of a production to chat, share ideas, information and the opportunity for new members to get involved. It will be held in the bar, which will be open, of course. Not forgetting the social aspect we hope to infuse into the Get Out days, by making them a Theatre Clean Up day. After the hoards of members and general public have been to see the production, it seems fitting that we all pull together to get the theatre clean and up together for the next production, continue with refurbishment work and enjoy the process - with the bar open when the work is done.

But we start with a Begin the Season Social on Saturday 4 October.

See you there.

## This season's productions

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The planned productions for this season are listed below, some are subject to licence agreements, but we start on Saturday 25 October with Sabotage Theatre's 'What All the Rabbits Are Doing'. This is a full length version of the production staged at the Edinburgh Festival last month.

Sat 25 Oct	to	Sat 1 Nov 08	<b>What All the Rabbits Are Doing</b> - Sabotage Theatre Co.
Fri 7 Nov	to	Sat 8 Nov 08	Rehearsed Reading - <b>The Man Who Was Hamlet</b>
Sat 8 Nov	to	Sun 9 Nov	<b>Stagecraft Workshop</b>
Sat 22 Nov	to	Sat 29 Nov 08	<b>True West</b> by Sam Shepard
Mon 1 Dec	to	Sat 6 Dec 08	<b>The Man Who Was Hamlet</b> by George Dillon
Sat 13 Dec	to	Sun 21 Dec 08	<b>It's a Wonderful Life</b> by Gerry McCrudden
Sat 24 Jan	to	Sat 31 Jan 09	<b>The Lying Kind</b> by Anthony Neilson
Sat 21 Feb	to	Sat 28 Feb 09	<b>Five Kinds of Silence</b> by Shelagh Stephenson / Janna Fox & Co.
Sat 28 Mar	to	Sat 4 Apr 09	<b>Physical Theatre</b> / Visual Devised Piece
Sat 2 May	to	Sat 16 May 09	<b>Festen</b> by David Eldridge
Mon 18 May	to	Sun 24 May 09	<b>Blasted</b> by Sarah Kane
Sat 20 Jun	to	Sat 27 Jun 09	<b>A View from a Bridge</b> by Arthur Miller
Sat 18 Jul	to	Sat 25 Jul 09	<b>Madame Rousseau</b> by Roger Taylor

In addition to the productions there are the new Members Meet evenings each month, starting on 3 November. The Community Cleanup and Get Out days on the Sunday after each production, starting on 2 November. But we start the way we would want to continue, with a social.

### Begin-the-Season-Social on Saturday 4 October

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## “Adopt-a-brick” gets results !

Well, having told you all that our theatre needed Mums and Dads to care for it by adopting a brick, fifty-six of you have so far done just that and raised almost £600 by doing so!

I think that's just marvellous; thank you.

That's £600 towards the fire-safety project that will eventually bring about the reopening of our second acting space - and some of us can just about remember what a treat of a place it is to work in.



So, well done us! Those of you thinking about joining in, forms are available in the bar at each performance. Your theatre really does need you!

**Mark Wilson**

The fund raising total is approaching £11,000 but we must keep it going in pursuit of our £20,000 target. Why not put your name in perpetuity on a seat for the upstairs theatre for £100? Or adopt a brick for £5 each? Or sponsor the 08/09 season for £250 (or persuade your business contacts to do so)?

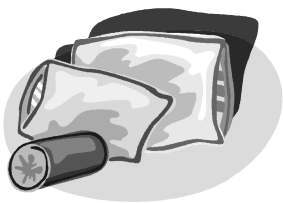
Email [mikestubbs2000@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mikestubbs2000@yahoo.co.uk) to get the ball rolling.

**Mike Stubbs**

## Our Yorkshire Friend

We have a member who lives in Yorkshire, Monica Bircham, and we're very grateful to her for contributing £30 as a donation to club funds. She says she visited the theatre last year and thinks we have a great space with great spirit.

Thanks, Monica. How right you are!



## Cushion Covers?

Does anyone have some spare cushion covers, please? We need 10 for The South Hall. Most of the cushions are 43cm x 43cm. If you can donate some nice bright ones please leave them for me in the office at the theatre.

**Mike Stubbs**

## Thank you, helpers!

A big thank you to all the helpers who contributed to decorating the Entrance area and the Office. Over several Saturdays, holidays and evenings Kathrin Zeisberg, Mark Green, Aaron Green, Izzy Mackenzie, Ben Pritchard, Lisa Feldman, Martin Kiss, Charlotte Grimes, Martin Hoskins, Jeff Driver, Roma Malik, Nicky Conlan and Strat Mastoris discovered layer underneath layer of history of the theatre whilst stripping away the posters in the Foyer, sanding doors and floors, filling holes and applying new colour to the whole area.

Strat documented all the posters in the Foyer prior to the decorating job.

Kathrin further cleaned the kitchen, the toilets and the hallway, which left the area with a lovely sparkle and a floral smell! Thank you!!!

**Saskia Ulrike Schilling**  
Production Manager

## AUDITION

Don't miss the enclosed audition notice for "**It's A Wonderful Life**", our spectacular Christmas show.

There's loads of scope for members young and not so young to join in on stage and in the production team, and have some fun!

**Mike**

## The very 1<sup>st</sup> Global Co-operation Street Party

**Bedford Place** (top end closed to traffic)  
**This weekend, Saturday 20th September 12 - 6pm**

**Live Music, Live Theatre, DJ's, Food, Prizes and more...**  
**All welcome, bring food/instruments**

*Hosted by Brighton Simpol Group, the neighbours of Bedford Place and the New Venture Theatre*

*Supported by JourneyOn - Streets for People (Brighton & Hove City Council)*

## The Anniversary

A couple of seasons back the New Venture introduced us to the host-ess from Hell in that excellent production of *Dinner*. Not to be out done Jerry Lyne has chosen to let us meet the mother from that infernal place.

Bill MacIlwraith's black comedy revolves around an annual family gathering that celebrates a wedding anniversary albeit that the husband is absent from it. In fact he is deceased but it is Mum's wish that she has all her family with her to celebrate the occasion and to take part in the toast to Dad.

Mum is a truly monstrous creation and the family assemble unwillingly to attend this ritual for they know from past experience that, like other rituals, victims will be sacrificed before the night is over. Rebellion is in the air and all are fearful of their mother's reaction.

Jerry Lyne, making a return to directing after too long an absence, ensured that the production flowed well with a tautness that was never lost. The realistic stage setting and choice of music ensured that the sixties, the period that the play took place in, was fully evoked. For many of us the evening had more than a touch of nostalgia.

And what a cast he picked! Not only was it strong in talent but it also was one that had bonded together during the rehearsal period

and were finely tuned in to each other.

As Tom, the youngest son, Matthew Lawson, exhibited both the character's bravado and vulnerability. His act of rebellion was to introduce to the family on this sacrosanct occasion, Shirley, and to announce their engagement. Emma Hallworth's performance as the fiancée was beautifully rounded. A fluffy exterior harboured a feisty determination. Her fight back against Mum was wonderful in its viciousness.

Son Terry and wife, Karen also had some unwelcome news to impart – they were planning to go off to Canada. Jim Calderwell impressed by giving another of his portrayals of a neurotic character. Angst and ulcer ridden, forever trying to put off the moment of making the announcement, he was a soul in torment. As his long suffering wife Tessa Pointing was almost Lady Macbeth like as she urged her unwilling husband on. She had some wonderful caustic speeches which she delivered with vitriolic spleen.

The remaining son Henry is unmarried and is the apple of his mother's eye. He poses no threat and is content to be controlled. She indulges him in his habit of wearing women's clothes and uses his brush with the law to manipulate his brothers. It was good to see Mike Chowney back on stage again and his quiet playing of Henry was in sharp contrast to the

hysteria of his two brothers.

But it is Mum who is the central character and what a part it offers a gifted actor and they do not come more gifted than Sheelagh Baker. Her acting skills are consistent and she has given some exceptional performances in the past but here she surpassed herself.

Watching her destroy her family and partners was like seeing a praying mantis devouring her victims – there was repulsion but also fascination. The mood swings were lightning fast – a vicious attack segued into charm but always there was an undercurrent of malevolent cunning.

I recall that when I saw *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* I was so incensed by the cunning and wicked mother created by Janet Hewlett-Davies that I wanted to hit the woman. Baker's performance was so powerful that I could have murdered her. Such was the emotion generated by the production that it was difficult to resist cheering the family when they all turned on Mum and one felt that she had at last been defeated. Imagine the free fall of elation when she played her last trick and won again.

On leaving the theatre, still quivering with intense emotion and exhilaration, I reflected that the fine direction and quality acting placed this high, if not first, on my list of finest NV productions.

**Barrie Jerram**

## The Anniversary

In the hands of a very different, less talented, group of actors and director, this would have been an amusing if lengthy piece of theatre, composed of one-dimensional characters involved in a one-dimensional plot. What we had instead was an object lesson in pace and a real richness of characterisation that made the play's darkness palpable. Unlike some recent correspondents, I will not say that this is 'the best thing I have ever seen at NVT' – such a judgement seems simplistic to my mind and denies the very wide range of quality work that we produce. Of its genre however, I have never seen anything better - professional or otherwise, never seen such fast-played cruelty. It burned. Thank you.

**Mark Wilson.**

## The Mayor of Brighton and Hove at NVT

For our last show of the season, 'Three Tall Women', the NVT were very pleased to welcome Brighton and Hove's Mayor Garry Peltzer Dunn to the Wednesday performance, along with Mr Alan Wright representing the local branch of The Alzheimers Society. Alzheimers, being a key theme of this very moving and emotional production and also one of The Mayor's chosen charities for this year. The Mayor was very impressed with the show and performances and gave further support to the New Venture by adopting two of our bricks.



The Mayor of Brighton & Hove

Photo by Amanda Unwin Mann

## THREE TALL WOMEN

On entering the studio theatre the audience could be forgiven for thinking that they had strayed into the world of Salvador Dali. Some of the usual seating had been removed and replaced by a variety of chairs each with a label attached. From the ceiling an assortment of chandeliers hung down lighting up a white line motif on the floor that gave the impression of a cracked mirror. On one side of the acting area stood a wardrobe with half a mirror embedded into it whilst on the other side a chair jutted out from the wall. This bizarre stage set, designed by NVT newcomer, Matt Johnson, appropriately reflected the surreal content of Edward Albee's play. As with several of his other later plays this work reflected his interest in the surreal and in experimentation.

One's eyes, having adjusted to the setting, then notice that the stage is already peopled. An old lady sleeps fitfully in a bed. A nurse/carer is sitting at a table playing patience whilst a young lady, later identified as a solicitor's clerk, sifts through documents.

The old lady wakes and begins a monologue, with only occasional interjections from the other characters, that skilfully depicts the confused mind of the 92 year old woman as she struggles with reminiscences of her life. The first Act ends with her having a stroke and slipping into a coma.

In the second act the bed is occupied by a mannequin wearing an oxygen mask and is watched over by two women. They are joined by the old lady, now sprightly and

coherent, and it gradually transpires that they are in fact one and the same. They represent the old lady at different ages of her life – at 70, 52 and 26. Between them they question and examine the reminiscences and statements delivered in the first act. Sex, life and death are discussed and we learn that the woman is a person who has become hardened through the burden of having to be strong for the whole family.



L-R Emma Prendergast, Janet Hewlett-Davies, Janna Fox

Photo by Strat Mastoris

The complex yet intriguing semi-autobiographical play was directed with assurance by Ian Black and superbly acted.

The part of the old lady is challenging particularly especially in the first act as it is almost a monologue. Janet Hewlett-Davies' performance was yet another one that demonstrated her capacity for great acting. It was full of subtle nuances and fully captured the many facets of senility – self pitying tears, frustration, lightening switches from comic cunning with triumphant cackling to childlike dependency. She was equally as good in the second act as the rational seventy year old and greatly amused with her telling of her husband's generosity with jewellery

and his bizarre and sexually way of presenting it to her.

Emma Prendergast gave strong contrasting portrayals with her two roles. As the nurse she was full of gentleness and patience that gave way, in the second act as the 52 year old, to a volatile nature. She was splendid in her anger regarding the rejection of her son, who she turned out of the house many years ago when she could not accept his homosexuality. He silently enters the room and sits at the bedside of the comatose figure, seeking the acceptance that will never come. Kieran Burke played this non-speaking role.

I was a little disappointed with Janna Fox's performance as the solicitor. She adopted a casual, throwaway style of delivery that I found difficult to hear. It did not help that she was static for most of the time on the other side of the stage with her back to me. No such reservations about her contribution in the second act. As the young alter ego she had the part nailed. The insecurity of youthfulness was there with the repeated assurances that she was a good girl. So was the hopefulness for her future that contrasted with the cynicism of the older pair. One felt her pain as she wailed "Are there to be no happy times" as she learnt from the others what was to befall her.

The play concludes with the old lady telling her that the happiest moment is "When it's all done. When we stop. When we can stop."

**Barrie Jerram**

## Induction to Production and Stage Management Sunday 19 October 3pm - 6.30pm NVT

This induction aims at everybody who is interested in Production and Stage Management. We will have a look at the different roles and what they include. Further will we look at the different spaces within the theatre and their relevance during a production (sound and light box, dressing rooms, backstage areas etc.) If you would like to get involved backstage, this is a very good opportunity to learn about Production and Stage Management and you might find yourself running the next production already! Spaces can be booked by contacting Ulrike on 07867725919 or [Ulrike.schilling@mac.com](mailto:Ulrike.schilling@mac.com).

## A review of **INTIMATE ENCOUNTERS**

Intimate Encounters explores intimacy in performance. For every individual, intimacy has a different, personal meaning. This is a work of closeness and respectful familiarity. As I enter the cloaked performance arena I have a body search/fleece, to check I'm not concealing anything... in another veiled area in an matronly way a nice friendly lady has a chat with me about any health issues, sits me down, asks me to remove shoes and socks, sprays my feet with a mint and geranium lotion, gives me a relaxing shoulder massage and a little chat to ease me into relaxation. Before I know it

a white blindfold is slipped over my eyes. I'm led away into abandonment. It's very tender. How willing I am to surrender/submit to a strangers touch. On three occasions my blindfold dissolves away from my face... in a fabric womb like tent a man lies down beside me on satin pillows and sings me a lullaby, then I'm re-blindfolded and led away... in another tented area a woman is waiting for me to tell me a secret that she's wanted to share.... in the final soft chamber a young man tells me he's been waiting for me, as he keeps my gaze and melts closer and closer, telling me now everything will be different, closer still then a blindfold embraces my eyelids again and I'm near wafted away. I allow myself to drift

and float within a sensory cloud of human pleasure. There are whisperings and little kisses about my neck. I feel cared for and treasured. When without everyday sight the body takes over with a sensory vision, a trusting. This is like a wonderful dream, being carried by a cloud of angels. Is this what heaven's like? This is what humans and earth can really be like. That's the delight. Though I was a little taken aback by the tongue in my ear! Once unwillingly released from this temple of sensory pleasure, I read in the comments book "It's like being in a David Lynch film!" Another had written how English to balk from being physically close to our fellow humans, and how liberating he'd found the experience. Another had written how such an experience would reduce someone to tears if they were without such contact in their everyday life. I left feeling nourished and my heart uplifted.

**MIM (Total Theatre Magazine)**

## Masks Acting Class starts on Monday 13 October

Ever wanted to learn how to bring masks to life? Or wondered how performers can seem to change masks' fixed expressions?

Here's your chance: 4 weeks of physical workshops will help you to:

- physically prepare for masks
- learn the rules of masks
- learn how to physicalise masks
- learn how to communicate character and improvise
- create short, devised masked performances

It will also help you to become a more physically aware performer.

We will be using full face Trestle masks, as created by Trestle Theatre Company.

It is advisable to attend all classes as they are progressive - the first one will involve physically preparing for wearing masks and understanding the rules. But don't worry, you don't need to be a gymnast!

Kirsty Harbron has been a member of NVT for 8 years and has appeared in many productions in that time. She is a trained Drama teacher, who has learned all she knows about masks from Toby Wilsher, the founder of Trestle Theatre Company... and those she has taught!

She will be directing 'Five Kinds of Silence' by Shelagh Stephenson in the new season.

## LETTERS

Dear Newsletter Editor,

I would like to say how deeply impressed I was by the high standard of professionalism in Ian Black's production of Edward Albee's Three Tall Women, which I saw the other night.

All the performances were excellent, and I hope it's not too invidious to single out the poised elegance of Janet Hewlett-Davies' reading, especially in the second act.

My sincere congratulations to all involved in this memorable production, and thanks for a splendid evening.

With best wishes,

**Ted McFadyen**