

Next Month

'The Permanent
Way'

By David Hare
Directed by Kirsty Halbron

18-25 February

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NEW VENTURE
T H E A T R E

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www.newventure.org.uk

'Kvetch'

By Steven Berkoff
Directed by Steven O'Shea
21-28 January 2012



'I'm afraid ... I fear ... I'm
lonely ... I want ... I need ...
I must ... I hunger ... I feel
... I desire ...'

In the foreword to his 1986 satirical, black comedy, **Kvetch**, (a Yiddish word denoting nagging complaints), Steven Berkoff dedicates his play to 'the afraid' which, to some extent, means that it's dedicated to all of us. Whether it's fear of illness, disease, unemployment, poverty, relationships, ageing, obesity, death or fear itself, we can all perceive our own anxieties reflected to some degree in the characters in the play. Being a Berkoff play means of course that the characters' anxieties and fears, (or kvetches), are taken to outrageous extremes.

Anyone who has experienced a Berkoff production, (in particular one in which he has directed or performed in), will know that he is a theatre practitioner who deals almost exclusively in extremes of human behaviour. When he first exploded on to the theatrical scene in 1975 with his play, **East**, his work was greeted with much controversy, praise and revulsion in equal measure, (although with regard to many theatre critics, primarily revulsion). With this play and others that followed including, **West, Greek and Decadence**, he carved out a niche for himself as a leading exponent of modern theatre combining a dynamic, high-octane, flamboyant sense of theatricality fusing movement, mime, expressionistic speech and audacious spectacle.

Winner of the 1991 Evening Standard Award for Best Comedy, 'Kvetch' is a study of the everyday anxieties, fears and paranoia that fester beneath our carefully cultivated social personas. The play focuses on the tensions and frustrations seething under the surface of domesticity in a marriage long devoid of any love, contentment or happiness. The thwarted hopes, dreams and ambitions of the characters are laid out in painful, poignant and often excruciatingly hilarious detail in this, his most successful and, perhaps, his most accessible play.



Andrew Allen is front centre, and behind (left to right) are: Janice Jones, Elizabeth Stapleton, Culann Smyth and Alistair Lock

Photo by Strati Mastoris

Its combination of very strong language and sexually explicit scenes render it a piece unsuited to the faint-hearted but as Berkoff himself once proclaimed concerning the nature of theatre:

"You must say what is inexpressible and unspeakable. You must confess your deepest secrets; you must also express your deepest, most fundamental passions. You must express things that nobody else would hear about, that you wouldn't tell your shrink, that you wouldn't tell your closest friend, the most abominable kind of imaginings you have. The worst things you can imagine, the best things you can imagine. That is the domain of theatre, to open up the skull and put out on stage that writhing can of worms".

In conclusion I would like to thank my exceptional cast, Janice Jones, Elizabeth Stapleton, Andrew Allen, Alistair Lock and Culann Smyth, the entire crew and all the administrative staff at the NVT for their invaluable work and support throughout this production.

Acting class

Light and Shade

9, 16, 23 and 30 January 2012

Andrew Allen

In the first series of Acting Classes for 2012, Andrew Allen (who will be directing 'Medea' later in the year) will be exploring the roller-coaster of emotions and acting choices we can make as performers when creating a role. Using improvisation, script, and chorus work, the intention is to reveal the liberation we find when we discover that we don't have to simply 'read the words on the page' ... and that, sometimes, simply reading the words on the page is actually the best decision! Working as individuals, or within groups, you can come along to all four workshops or simply drop in to as little as you like . . .

Please bring your membership card with you, thank you!

Devised Theatre

6, 13, 20 and 17 February

Sarah Davies and Ulrike Schilling

Come and celebrate you're inner child. Through play, games, some basic clowning techniques we'll open up our imaginations and ability to play like no one is watching in a safe, supportive and fun-filled environment. Explore the unknown, not taking oneself seriously, develop confidence and humour to cheer up dreary Monday nights in February. Beat the recession with laughter.

Intensive acting workshop An Actors Journey - 6 week course

19, 26 Feb., 4, 11, 18 & 25 March
Sundays 7pm -9:30pm

James Newton

Using a very simple and effective process of units, objectives and actions we will create some pow-

erful, truthful drama which will culminate in a performance at the NVT on Saturday 14th April 2012. Over a period of 6 weeks we will breakdown the script into units and establish clear objectives and actions for the characters in the play. This is the same rehearsal process you will find up and down the country at professional theatres such as The Royal Court, Manchester Royal Exchange and the RSC.

Our work will be a series of scenes from a variety of playwrights and everyone taking part will be expected to perform on the date of the show.

The classes will be undertaken by James Newton (All My Sons, Breaking The Code, American Buffalo at NVT). James trained at The Royal Scottish Academy of Music & Drama and worked as an actor in TV, film and theatre for over 10 years. He now works as a full time director and writer.

Costs: £50 Non-Members/£35 Members

Places are limited and can be booked online at
www.ticketsource.co.uk/newventuretheatre

Sound workshop for directors, sound designers, writers, actors and technicians

Saturday 18 February, 11am - 4pm

Mark Hewitt

Theatre maker and director of live literature shows, Mark Hewitt, presents a one day workshop exploring the use of recorded sound and text. The session will be practical, and explorative and will allow participants to experiment with creating sound material that can be quickly manipulated on a laptop and used within the context of a production. The day is open to technicians, actors, directors, designers and writers who can all have an opportunity to contribute to the working process. The day will feature extracts from a new work in progress, Altered Egos by writer Bernadette Cremin, to show how simple tech-

niques can be applied to great effect.

Bring written or found text, unusual music and sound effects, recordings, your own voice and your creativity. If you have any digital recording equipment feel free to bring it along.

Limited places available, please book on
line www.ticketsource.co.uk/newventuretheatre

Free for Members, Non-members £15

Last years Xmas Social

On the evening of Sunday 18th December it was time for our Annual Xmas Social. Around 50 members came to enjoy a festive evening at the NVT. The mood was set by music and performances, a special Xmas raffle and our NVT angels. Lou Preecy, Moog Gravett, James Camp, Izzy Mackenzie and Tom Robinson filled our ears and hearts with festive music and Liz Stapleton, Ken Potter, Marie Ellis and Moog performed monologues from various plays. Big thanks to all the performers for their contributions and to Chris Pugh for technical support.

As part of our ongoing fundraising, Mike Stubbs and Judy Milton hosted a raffle among which prizes were meals in various pubs and restaurants, flower vouchers, a bottle of scotch, Italian espresso cups and a round of golf. Congratulations to all the lucky winners and a big thank you for all the generous donations. Thanks as well to Inge Roberts, who was our lucky angel and drew the winners.

Our fundraising schemes of bricks and angels were successfully offered as Xmas gift ideas for a loved one, not only helping you to find a great present, but supporting the development of our Main Theatre. Thanks to all the kind angels and foster parents of the NVT.

The evening concluded at our lovely bar with swapping of Xmas cards, plenty of merry conversation and drinks. Many thanks for all the kind people helping at the bar, especially to Gaelle Clark and Ian Black.

Brighton and Hove Arts Council Drama Awards

On Monday 12th December 2011 the annual Brighton and Hove Arts Council Drama Awards evening was hosted at BHASVIC. NVT's production of 'Iron' competed with productions produced by Rottingdean Drama Society, Wick Theatre Company, Lewes Little Theatre, Southwick Players and Burgess Hill Theatre Club, some of which faced difficulties with leads dropping out in the final dress rehearsal.

The Adjudicator Gary Sefton commented that often the only difference between professional and amateur theatre is getting paid or not. He described 'Iron' as 'excellent piece of theatre in the classic black box' with its set stripped right back and a very good use of lighting, which rather suggests and

leaves freedom of imagination to the audience. The opening sounds captured the prison environment completely and the sound and lighting worked excellent together. The main characters of Fay (Sandie Armstrong) and Josie (Erica Thornton) never let the energy drop throughout the play and very skilfully progressed through an intense and extreme range of emotions. Gary further congratulated the guards (Laura Scobie and Alistair Lock) for their great work, making this production an ensemble piece.

'Iron' was nominated for 'Best Director' (Jerry Lyne), 'The Arthur Churchill Award for Excellence', 'Bea Waters Challenge Cup for Best Overall Production', 'Best Actor' (Alistair Lock), 'Best Actress' (Sandie Armstrong and Erica Thornton), 'Best Sound Design' (Jezz Bowden and Daniel Stevens) and 'Best Lighting Design' (Strat Mastoris).

Congratulations to all the winners and everyone who was involved in the production to make it such a success.



BRIGHTON & HOVE ARTS COUNCIL AWARDS 2011

NEW VENTURE THEATRE'S

'IRON'

By Rona Munro

Directed by Jerry Lyne

wins

◆ Bea Waters Challenge Cup for **Best Overall Production**

and

◆ **Best Actress**
Erica Thornton

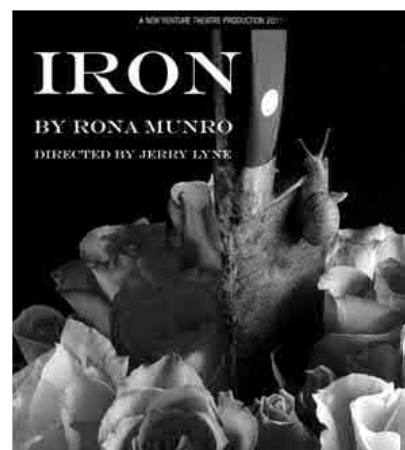
and

◆ **Best Sound Design**
Jezz Bowden

and

◆ **Best Lighting Design**
Strat Mastoris

WOW! Well done NVT!



Another reading of 'Iron' by Strat Mastoris

Rona Munro's 'Iron' deals with the relationship between Josie and her mother Fay, who has spent the last fifteen years in prison for the murder of her husband, Josie's father. Well-written drama carries multiple layers of meaning, though, and it soon becomes apparent that 'Iron' is a play about memory. Josie can remember nothing of her life prior to the murder of her father when she was aged ten, so she has come to the prison to see Fay and get some answers. Her mother has never revealed anything to anyone about the murder, and Josie needs to know what can have driven her to kill.

One interpretation of the play sees Fay as a manipulative murderer who has never admitted her own guilt, but a number of NVT audience members felt that her daughter was involved. Josie's total lack of memories points to some incredibly traumatic event which has taken place, and this has to be central to the play; child abuse is a possibility though never mentioned, but there are several references to her father's violent behaviour towards her mother. My own feeling is that, whatever the motive, Josie herself killed her father and her mother is protecting her from the memory of that terrible moment.

When Josie first appears at the prison, dressed smartly though rather formally in black, she seems to have had an unhappy emotional life. She is troubled, and in great need of finding memories to give her back her past. Her mother is keen to supply details of their earlier life with her father, but steers well clear of anything to do with his death. Fay is very adept at painting word pictures which bring the past alive for Josie, and ecstatic that she has regained her daughter. She will remain in prison, but she wants to live vicariously through Josie, and keeps urging her to go out and enjoy herself.

But Josie wants more. She wants to reopen the trial proceedings and go over the events with her solicitor and a psychiatrist. She thinks that her mother might have been justified in killing her father and therefore eligible for appeal and release. This is the one thing that Fay fears. In the hands of a psychiatrist, Josie's role as killer might well come out, and she wants to save her daughter from that knowledge above all else. After all, if Fay had indeed killed under overwhelming stress then why has she remained silent for fifteen years?

At this point, there is a very significant stage direction (page 92) - *'A long pause. Fay is just looking at Josie, a very, very painful decision is forming in her.'* After this moment Fay changes tack and forces Josie to relive the murder of her father, taking the role of his killer for herself. Fay intends to plant a false memory in her daughter, and she skilfully uses all the tabloid newspaper stereotypes of killers to do so:

"I felt my lips pull back from my teeth in a snarl like a dog's."

"I bared my teeth like a wolf. Like a demon."

"I felt there was a devil in me."

"I think I was the devil then, or his dog."

These are hysterical images which see 'Evil' as a form of demonic possession, and Fay stitches them together to create a picture that her daughter will believe. And it works; Josie leaves, never to see her mother again, implanted with a fake memory to protect her against the past. Authors often give their characters names which are significant, and I don't think it's by chance that the family's name is Kerr, making Fay ... Fay Kerr. Faker.

And the name Fay itself is a variation on 'fairy', along with 'faerie', 'fae' and others. A common trait of fairies is their use of magic to alter or disguise the appearance of things, just as Fay does here. The one thing which can harm fairies, and which is used for protection against them, is ... iron. The good-luck superstition of nailing an iron horseshoe to a house door is actually for protection against fairies. Rona Munro has chosen her names well.

We see Josie one last time, when she comes to make financial arrangements for her mother, and it is obvious that Fay's deception has borne fruit: *'Lights up on the interview room. Josie is waiting. She looks quite different. She's wearing red. She has large earrings on, she looks as bright and sparkly as anyone could get away with, she's still on the right side of classy. She looks very good.'*

In the last scene, Fay is discovered smuggling a stone into her cell. We have learnt earlier that prisoners use these to sharpen metal objects to kill themselves (The bedstead that Fay will open an artery on is of course made of iron). The guard's response (she hates Fay) is to let her keep it: "Just keeping your options open, Eh? Och well, what's life without choices?". Like so many mothers before and since, Fay has chosen to sacrifice herself for her child. She has given her daughter back her life, now she can take her own and they both will find peace.

For me, this reading is much richer, with more of a narrative journey. Fay is not simply a killer who is finally badgered into confessing. What do other people think?

Strat Mastoris 2011
strat@stratmastoris.com

'Talking Dog'

By Daisy Dog Productions

Written and & Directed by Sarah Davies with Charlotte Grimes

Reviewed by Barry Hewlett-Davies

On a cold and mean December afternoon, I can't pretend there was much of a spring in my step as I arrived at the theatre to see an improvised play about talking dogs.

I need not have worried. The show is full of tenderness and charm – no hint of the sentimental whimsy I thought we might be in for – given what people say about doggy behaviour.

[Declared interest: I am a cat man.]

The cast of four has an easy confidence. They engage at once with the audience, eager to make eye contact. There weren't many of us in the studio but they played as if we were a full house – professionalism in action. In fact, professional is what they are throughout, not only with their acting but with puppetry, mime and mask work.

The show takes about an hour and a quarter. In that time we go to the circus which has funny conjuring and a flirtatious French poodle, to a party political dog rally, and to a cinema where there isn't a dog in sight. We are even in on the start of World War II with Neville Chamberlain's strangely-elocuted voice announcing that the balloon's gone up. Running in

the background to provide the framework, is the story of an ordinary family. It's all done in a permanent set well-suited to quick changes of locale.

There is a real-seeming stick puppet dog [a Boxer?] made by Anita Sullivan. He has a surprisingly expressive face. The people in the show who aren't dogs, wear masks from the Trestle Theatre Company.

The ensemble is Claire Armstrong, Mark Green, Frank Leon and Leanne MacKenzie.

The run-up to Christmas is arguably not the best time to offer an improvised show. Theatre-goers want something they can trust without having to work too hard. It doesn't have to be a pot-boiler - how about a Priestley? Or Ayckbourn or Goldsmith?

Which is why I hope this talented group will keep their production together and offer it again in a slot where audiences are more likely to take a gamble. Improvised theatre is always a risk. On this occasion, one worth taking.

If this is what going to the dogs is like, count me in.

[Since I wrote this review, some members have insisted the show was not "improvised" but devised.]

Thoughts from a South Hall Chair

Here we are a third of the season gone already and it's been good so far. Powerful productions and great performances, with a sprinkling of awards too; as you will see elsewhere in this newsletter. Sadly we have started to suffer from reduced audience levels, so if you haven't been to see the last three productions, please come along in January.

The Main Theatre refurbishment is moving on well with a new rake in place, giving similar leg room to that of the Studio and a new Lighting / Sound box in the process of being built. Many thanks to all involved in this work.

We are concerned about the apparent lack of interest in the NVT as a whole; as witnessed by the barely quorate AGM. Admittedly AGMs are not the most exciting events we put on, but they can reflect the mood of the members and set the future direction of the theatre. Therefore we will be emailing out a short survey to try and find out why this happened and what members want from their NVT. (For those who don't have email access or haven't received this by 10th January, please ring the admin number 01273 808353 and leave your name etc. – a copy will be sent to you).

It may only be the beginning of January, but the end of this season beckons. The writing aspect of the 10-Minute Play Competition will close soon, just time to get your entry in before 31 January. Proposals for next season are winging their way to Uli, our Artistic Director; with a closing date of 18 February. So if you are interested in either don't miss the deadlines. Not forgetting that we still have some great productions to come during the rest of this season.

Finally I would like to wish you a fun, happy and theatrical 2012.

Ian

'Iron' by Rona Munro

Directed by Jerry Lyne

Reviewed by Barry Hewlett-Davies

If you were to believe what some of the papers say, you'd think being sent to prison is like finding yourself in a holiday camp – regular meals, central heating, counselling, education classes, recreation and TV, all with daily exercise. It's really rather like what happens in Porridge on TV, isn't it?

The only answer to that is "NO!"

Rona Munro's play is set in the regime of a Glasgow gaol. Though she is not primarily concerned with polemics, she tells her story in such immediate human terms and so without sentimentality that what she says hits you hard and straight in the stomach.

She presents four very real people – a woman doing life for sticking a knife in her husband; her daughter who has spent

most of her life not knowing the truth; a female prison officer who may be evilly-intended; her male colleague apparently dedicated to doing a nasty job with *ness* and understanding.

You feel you get to know all of them very well and very quickly. But how do they deal with one another? Are their relationships what they seem? Are they all behaving truthfully? What is truth when you are confined and disorientated?

Jerry Lyne's cast deals with the situation with confidence and style, a great team and brilliant! They are Sandie Armstrong, Erica Thornton, Alistair Lock and Laura Scobie. I won't discuss them individually because they work so successfully as a group.

When I was younger, I was in

and out of prison regularly. I do not have a criminal record. I was part of a Home Office Press team responsible for explaining the work of the then Prison Commission to the world at large. From that experience I know how accurate this production is. Unfortunately.

The way the play looks is crucial. Bleak and stark are the keys. Light is important and Strat Mastoris designed it well. The studio is black with few props, the only colours the red cover on the prison bed and the few flowers in the garden. The lighting gives it the depth it needs.

At first sight, you might think you're in for a dismal evening but in fact, it's a valuable experience in the theatre. It comes with all the noise of a prison but not, thank God, the smell.



Just married - Gaelle and John

Our new treasurer, Gaelle, celebrated her wedding in December and is now Mrs Clark.

We wish Gaelle and John a long and happy marriage.

Congratulations from all of us at NVT!

A quiz to start the New Year courtesy of M.J. Birdwhistle, with love



1. Portuguese navigators discovered 'The river of January' on Jan 1st 1502. What is 'The river of January'?
2. On Jan 1st 1907 US President Theodore Roosevelt shook a record number of hands in one day. How many hands did he shake? Plus or minus 1,000
3. The Anglo Saxon name for January was which predatory creature?
4. Traditionally, what do the Dutch eat to usher in the New Year?
 - a. Raw Herring
 - b. Gouda Cookies
 - c. Oliebollen (donuts)
 - d. Frikadellen (Hamburger patties)
5. Which two European countries declared their independence on Jan 1st 1993?
6. Which man led the offensive against French troops in Indo China that began on Jan 1st 1950?
7. The US Congress prohibited the importation of what into the USA on Jan 1st 1808?
8. On New Year's Day 1925 Norway changed the name of its capital city to Oslo. What was the previous name?
9. Which 1972 film and mega box office success took place between New Years Eve and New Years Day?
10. In which film did Helen Mirren appear with the word 'Year' in the title?
11. In which film did Mickey Rourke appear with the word 'Year' in the title?
12. Traditionally, what do people in Portugal eat when the clock strikes 12 on New Year's Eve?
 - a. 12 grapes
 - b. 12 sardines
 - c. 12 oysters
 - d. 12 almonds
13. A BOAC turboprop Bristol Britannia flew from London to New York in record time on Jan 1st 1958. Plus or minus 1 hour, what was the record time?

Answers? Look for white on black

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- NVT QUIZ - ANSWERS
1. Rio de Janeiro
 2. 8,513
 3. Wolf, Wolf month
 4. c. Olivebollen (donuts)
 5. Czech Republic and Slovakia
 6. Ho Chi Minh
 7. Slaves
 8. Christina
 9. The Poseidon Adventure
 10. 2010 (The Year We Make Contact)
 11. The Year of the Dragon
 12. a. 12 grapes
 13. 7h 57 m

February 2012 newsletter

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MANAGEMENT: Who we are and how to reach us

NAME	ROLE	EMAIL	PHONE	MOBILE
Ian Black	Chairman	ian.black@newventure.org.uk		
Jerry Lyne	Secretary			
Ulrike Schilling	Artistic Director	ulrike.schilling@newventure.org.uk		
Gaelle Clark	Treasurer	gaelle.petit@newventure.org.uk		
Hannah Liebeskind	NVT Production Manager	hanah.liebeskind@newventure.org.uk		
Chris Pugh	Technical Manager	chris.pugh@newventure.org.uk		
Hugh McDowall	Marketing & Publicity	hugh.mcdowall@newventure.org.uk		
Dan Walker	Marketing & Publicity (web)	dan.walker@newventure.org.uk		
Sarah Garbutt	Volunteer Liaison	volunteering@newventure.org.uk		
Lou Preecy	NVT Front of House	frontofhouse@newventure.org.uk		
Linda Potter	Membership Secretary			
Natasha Borg	Box Office	boxoffice@newventure.org.uk		
Charles Gilson	Newsletter Editor			
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