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# 'Medea'

By Euripides  
Translated by Tom Paulin  
(by arrangement with Nick Hern Books)  
Directed by Andrew Allen  
16-23 June 2012



## **S**ometimes you just need to take a leap into the dark.

I've been getting a fairly uniform reaction from people when they hear that I'm directing Medea. There's a raising of eyebrows, a tight smile, and a stuttered "W-w-well .. Good Luck

importance of support from your fellows whether it is an extraordinary woman flowering under praise (Kvetch, Little Voice) or the unfailing solidity of age old love (Love Letters, Talking Dog). I always know that when I'm involved in a pro-

lengthy rehearsals, despite the scenes that for a long while I couldn't quite solve, I found myself turning up to the NVT with a spring in my step. It didn't entirely make sense, until I realised the obvious: namely, the cast and crew that I had been blessed with.



Photo by Strat Mastoris

Now, as director, I earnestly believe that it's (part of) your job to look after, nurture and support your company, and, as much as is possible, make them feel safe. I'm not sure that it's ever occurred to me before this production that the relationship can go both ways. This was a company that have always been positive, encouraging and trusting whilst I ambled down some .. interestingly creative cul-de-sacs waiting patiently for my return to basic logic and narrative structure. For anything you see in Medea that you like you can thank them. For anything that you don't, you can blame me.

with that". The inference being, of course, that anyone would be mad to take on this intense play and think that they have anything new to bring to the party. After all, it's a text that's older than Christ, for - well, Christ's sake.

Although it's a Greek tragedy, it isn't just hubris that's enabled me to think that I can do this. As the NVT hurtles towards its anniversary year, it's instructive to note how many of the plays this year have talked about the

duction here, in whatever capacity, I have support and generosity from all quarters, often even from people I will never meet, but who are happy to bring the best out in this theatre. People who know me will affirm that I'm not always the most cheerful chap around, and so you'd think that taking on this blood drenched tragedy, saddled with my interesting and sometimes unformed ideas would result in, at the very least, a minor nervous breakdown. But despite the intense,

It would of course, be pretty bad form to single any people out for special mention, because it means that you're not naming a significant list of others equally deserving of a

*Continued on page 2*



**See page 5: Introducing new monthly feature:  
Members' Forum - your chance to be heard**

## 'Medea' continued from page 1



name-call, but hell, it's a Greek tragedy, so it would be appropriate to let the hubris

do its magic one last time in the case of two in particular. So let me mention Natasha Borg, who designed our unique and exciting set, but even more importantly, whenever I attempted to compromise or back-pedal on one of my sillier ideas would always respond with great assurance: "I think we can do better". If we could distil and bottle Natasha's aura of calm and grace then, seriously, all war would end. Likewise, I've been extraordinarily lucky to have Ulrike Schilling at my side, who as well as being Artistic Director of this theatre and assisting with other productions, has been invaluable in more ways than her credits in the programme will suggest. On the occasion that I would slowly notice some upcoming problem or

challenge I would turn to Uli .. who would have already in her hand a variety of possible solutions. It was rare that anything could really go wrong because Uli always considers all the eventualities.

One eventuality is that we have something special here with Medea. Yes, I know as director I'm almost contractually obliged to say that, but one of the most exciting things about the New Venture Theatre is .. well, that you can be exciting. Too often the risk is taking no risk at all, of being afraid of the chance of failure. But I'm always emboldened by the NVT, always assured that we can try for something more.

Time, then, to take a leap into the dark. Don't worry, you'll be quite safe. We'll take your hand and guide you through.

Shall we dance?

## Positive feedback from a school trip we took to Streetcar on Tuesday 8th May

Eight year 13 students saw a super performance of A Streetcar Named Desire at the excellent New Venture Theatre in Bedford Place on Tuesday 8th May.

Here are their thoughts!

"The actors were amazing and it helped so much with revision."

Isobel Messer "The small theatre made the play really personal, and I really liked how skilled the actors were."

Melanie Pullan "Brought the play to life with great accents and brilliant acting"

Emma Ovenden "To see the play performed made it much easier to visualise and has helped me to understand it more."

Charlotte Huet "The lighting effects were really well done and highlighted the theme of light versus dark within the play. I would recommend it to anyone studying the play".

Hannah Kinsey "I had my doubts about the play but it won me over. The performance was true to the original."

Fahim Ahmed "Very well staged and directed with good acting. Lighting and sound were also spot on. Good atmosphere too!"

And the teacher?

"The scenes between Blanche and Stella were very strong, and I jumped when Stanley threw the radio out of the window during the poker night scene, even though I knew it was coming!"

**Mr Breckenridge**

## Thoughts from a South Hall Chair

Here we are having completed another Fringe Festival, with a sell out production and three great events in the last week. For those who managed to get tickets to see our festival productions you will have seen we now have a monitor in the South Hall with scrolling information about forthcoming productions. Many thanks to Mike Graney for the TV and Chris Pugh for setting up the system.

Now we move onto the last two productions of the season – Medea and the 10-Minute Plays. To close the season we will have the much cherished NVT Awards, so keep thinking about those performances you have seen.

Plans for the Main Theatre Refurbishment are continuing with detailed work on the lighting system and stage setup. Along side this Judy Milton, our new fundraising co-ordinator is working hard with her small group to progress the funding of the work. Many thanks to all on the planning, development and fundraising teams for their hard work to realise this massive project.

As you will have seen from the newsletter recently we have to review the distribution process of the newsletter following the significant increase in second class postage.

Therefore from next season we will be changing to an email system for the vast majority of members. We will maintain a small postal service for those members who do not have email facilities and there will still be a few copies available in the theatre. However, we are looking to use this as an opportunity to move to **colour** (except for the printed copies). We will continue to post out the brochures 3 times a year, but all other updates that would have come with the newsletter e.g. audition notices etc. will be emailed as well. This will be a major change in our newsletter and I hope you will enjoy the new colour version.

**Ian Black**

# Notes & Plans from our Artistic Director

## Acting Class

4, 11, 18, 25 June -

Ulrike Schilling

Theatre Practitioners - rehearsal techniques and performance style - Kirsty Elmer

An exploration of rehearsal techniques and performance styles of 20th Century theatre practitioners and theatre companies.

Each workshop will explore the styles of a different practitioner or company. Ever wanted to know more about Stanislavski's approaches to rehearsal of text? Want to create Brecht's Epic Theatre? Want to experiment with DV8's physical theatre techniques? Then come along to these acting classes and explore the varied styles that have influenced contemporary theatre.

2, 9, 16, 23 and 30 July

Find your inner clown - Andy Thomas

Come on a journey with Andy Thomas as we seek to find our 'inner fool', our natural state of being funny. Using game, improvisation, group work and paired work we shall create comic situations and see where our 'fool' lies. We shall follow the methods used by Philippe Gaulier in Paris, who trained such famous clowns as Sacha Baron-Cohen. Fun, active and inclusive, we shall aim to have a good time and learn from each other and find our potential. Andy Thomas is a Brighton based comedy performer and teacher, one half of 'Thomas and Maloney' and created

'Crimes Against Humanities Teachers' which won best comedy in the Brighton Festival.

## NVT Awards

Whilst our 64th season is still going we already had some amazing treats and great performances throughout the year and there is more to come!

Many of the shows have been sell outs and if you did manage to get a ticket you surely know why. To remember and celebrate some of the great achievements NVT and all involved experienced we are holding the NVT Awards at the 'End of Season Social' on Saturday 28th July at 7:30.

I am pleased to announce that our guest designer for the awards this year is Ben Pritchard, so you can expect original treats as trophy!

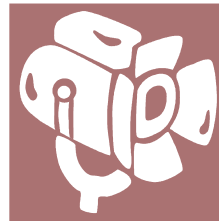
As usual we will be having a raffle and if you came to the last socials you know what great prices our fundraising team organised for us!

Even though the season will be officially over, but if you can't get enough of NVT and would like to come during the summer break, this is your chance to still get involved in the restoration of the Main Theatre, as many jobs will be done over the summer and there is plenty to get involved with. Alternatively get in touch with Jerry Lyne, details on the last page of this newsletter.

And of course, if you want to chat to any director or anybody involved in next season's productions the ideal way for networking is our amazingly cheap and friendly bar.

I look forward to seeing you there

**Ulrike, Artistic Director**



## Spotlight on Sarah Garbutt Volunteer Liason

### Why did you decide to join NVT?

I've always loved the theatre, it's an environment I felt comfortable in and when I came to the new members' evening it seemed like a really friendly place. So I thought I would join!

### How long have you been a member?

Just about 2½ years

### What have been the highlights for you?

Working on Gaby Goes Global. The cast and crew were and still are a really good bunch of people and I now have some great friends, thanks to that production.

### What does your current role involve/cover?

I do the volunteer liaison, so if anyone emails [volunteering@newventure.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@newventure.org.uk) they get me! So basically I make sure that they receive an email back and an invitation to the next new members' evening. I attend all the new members evenings with Uli and Ian and we show everyone around the theatre, tell them all about NVT and then try and place them in a position that they would like to get involved in such as lighting or make-up or whatever it is. But we always try and get people behind the bar and in the box office.

I have decided to step down at the next AGM as I'm getting married next year and that's enough to organise! It also give someone else the opportunity to get more involved with the theatre.

### What have been the most satisfying roles/positions on or off the NVT stage?

Surviving a 2 week run of a show during the Festival and working full time . . . it takes tired to a new level.

### What are your major interests outside of NVT?

I love the cinema and go a lot, I kayak and have just got a new bike which I think will become my trusty steed. . . and for the next 15 months everything 'weddings' is right up there with my major interests.

### What has been your greatest life achievement?

Moving here from London and not knowing a soul 12 years ago and managing to make myself a pretty good life :-)

# 'A Streetcar Named Desire'

by Tennessee Williams

Directed by Mark Wilson

Designed by Kate Greaves

A review by Barry Hewlett-Davies

With a play as iconic as *Streetcar* and as famously well-populated in the past (Marlon Brando, Vivien Leigh, Laurence Olivier, Renee Asherson, Bonar Colleano, Claire Bloom, Glenn Close) it is not easy to come to a new production with a clear head. There are bound to be different perspectives and this show, in particular, has some pretty unexpected changes of emphasis.

Mark Wilson does an arena-style presentation, opening up a sexy steamy household for all New Orleans to see at close range. He has a reputation for throwing new light on familiar stories and gives us an ensemble evening we're all invited to join in. There's much card-playing, whisky-swilling, heavy smoking, shouting and fighting from some tough-looking people. Though this doesn't always work to the play's advantage, the audience is in no doubt they are involved in a lot going on!

Everything depends, though, on Blanche, Stanley, Stella and Mitch.

Lauren Varnfield is Blanche, the faded Southern Belle who sees herself in the manner of Dumas. She has a rapid delivery throughout, her frailty covered by a strange and calculated determination. Her final line, the famous one about always having depended on the kindness of strangers is not quite what it seems, therefore, You can't always hear what she says. Her reference to prostitution almost disappears.

Stanley is Emmett Friel and he comes on in a permanent bad mood. His aggression is not so much from his tremendously self-assured sexuality, but from his determination to destroy Blanche. Blanche describes him as an animal – but she is talking about sex, not violence.

Arabella Gibbins, a cool confident actor, is his wife, Stella. She recognises the brute in Stanley – and relishes the passion it unleashes. At the same time her tremendous compassion for Blanche is very moving and there is a very generous warmth about her.

Mitch (Warren Saunders) is Mister Honourable to Stanley's Caliban. He's a natural. That his scenes with Blanche don't always work is not their fault – they are defeated (hidden in fact) by the design. This is a pity. Warren is never less than impressive to watch

In a note in the programme, Mark Wilson says he is taking us to a New Orleans where we can experience for ourselves the sights and smells and the tastes and sounds. I'll leave it to the audience to decide how well this works. Tennessee Williams wanted us to feel seduced by the redolence of bananas and coffee, and music on a honky-tonk piano played by brown fingers. All under an azure sky !

*Streetcar* was his favourite play and with Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is the most-often performed American play in the world. Its strength is the sense of unutterable pity it carries – a wound that never heals, the signature of Tennessee's best work in fact. A possible weakness of this production is that it is like opening the front of a doll's house – everything is on show from the start. It could be more sexually-driven and I would have welcomed stronger emphasis on its essential truth – excessive lust destroys.

*The full cast:*

*Lauren Varnfield, Arabella Gibbins, Emmett Friel, Warren Saunders, Steve Larkin, Emmie Spencer, Matthew Reynolds, Susan Manning, Tess Gill, Jason Rhodes, Lucy Roberts.*

## Fancy being our Social Secretary?

This is a fun job, taking charge of 4 socials a year for members and guests – even more fun if you do it with one or two friends.

We usually have a theme for each social and some entertainment put on by members - in April, for example, directors presented their plays for next season and we saw a 10 minute version of *Hamlet*, directed by James Newton.

Each social raises money for NVT, helps keep members together and attract new ones.

The next social is on July 28<sup>th</sup>.

We're open to your ideas, so if you're interested please have a word with Uli, Judy or Mike at the Acting Classes.

Or email [mike stubbs 2000@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mike.stubbs2000@yahoo.co.uk).

**JULY 2012 newsletter**

Copy deadline: Monday 11 June

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Stuffing: Saturday 30 June

# MEMBERS' PAGE - have your say

## Letter to the editor

Dear Mr. Editor,

I enjoy coming to see your shows at New Venture Theatre. The standard this year in particular, is excellent – I am thinking of Little Voice, Kevtch and Permanent Way especially.

But why, oh why, do you treat the audience the way you do? The usual pushing and shoving to get into the auditorium seems to have become a permanent and very annoying feature and once you are in there, there is no guarantee at all that the show will start when you say it will. The usual excuse is that you are “waiting for late-comers.”

Why?

When I go to the Theatre Royal – or even the cinema – I make sure I get there in time. If I were late, I would be amazed if they held things back for me. Why do you do it? If people coming late know in advance you will wait, why should they bother?

Come on! We pay to come in. Show us some good manners in return,

Yours etc

**D. J. Schultz**



## Suggestions? *Members'* *Forum*

We thought it would be a good idea for Members to have a section in the newsletter to help them be more involved in the life of NVT.

It is a chance for everyone to come up with their thoughts and ideas. It can include suggestions for theatre trips, activities or requests, or comments to the Committee.

Here is an opportunity for you to have your say. So from July we will be setting aside half a page for Members in the newsletter.

Please get in touch with the editor if you want further information.

The copy date for the July newsletter is Monday 11 June.

We are looking forward to having a lively addition to the newsletter.

## Leo Knapp

May 9, 1991 - May 6, 2012

Leo was a familiar face at the Monday night acting classes, where he was happy to throw himself into whatever task was given to him.

Full of fun and laughter, he was always the life and soul of the party at the pub gatherings afterwards.

Tragically taken from us just three days before his 21st birthday, his spirit will always live on at the NVT.

You will never be forgotten, Leo.

*Murray Hecht*

## Open Committee Meetings

Following a number of requests for more open information, we are extending a welcome to members to attend our monthly Committee meetings.

The forthcoming meetings are:

2 June, 7 July, 4 August, 1 September, 6 October, and 3 November.

All on Saturday mornings at 11 a.m.

If you'd like to attend, please contact me.

**Jerry Lyne**  
**Secretary**

**[jerry.lyne@btinternet.com](mailto:jerry.lyne@btinternet.com) or 01273 446574**



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