

NVT Newsletter

May 2012

Coming in June:

'MEDEA'

By Euripedes

Translated by
Tom Paulin
(by arrangement with
Nick Hern Books)

Directed by
Andrew Allen

16-23 June

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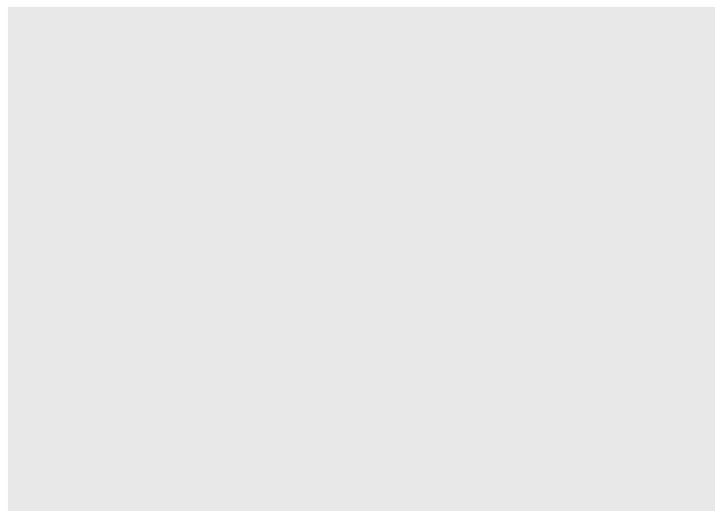
This year's NVT Brighton Festival Production Tennessee Williams' **'A Streetcar Named Desire'**

5-19 May

New Orleans – Blanche is all but destitute, seemingly unstable. Her sister, Stella, however, has managed the family loss of fortune by marrying Stanley, a Polish immigrant. They're happy in their one-bedroomed apartment.

Managing Blanche's sudden arrival is less simple. Her horror at Stella's situation brings her into direct conflict with Stanley and the three-way dynamic is set for tragedy.

This production of Tennessee Williams' classic brings back together the award-winning design and directorial team of Mark Wilson and Kate Greaves that brought you 'A View From The Bridge' in 2010



Lauren Varnfield as Blanche and Emmett Friel as Stanley
in 'A Streetcar Named Desire'.

Next season 2012-2013

On Saturday 14th April at the Social some 50 members were entertained by a performance of Hamlet ever so slightly shortened to a 15 minute performance including encore. James Newton lead a workshop over 6 weeks in which a variety of actors, NVT members as well as new faces, explored different text and then developed a fun performance for the Social. Once everyone on stage was 'dead' and the audience's laughter and giggles subsided, Ian announced the directors and plays of the 10 minute play competition performed in July. After some fundraising appeals and promotion of the extensive raffle prizes organised by Anderson and Judy, the next season was introduced and directors pitched their productions and visions for next season before networking and socialising in the bar continued.

The evening was concluded by the Raffle draw, including food, flower and garden vouchers, and celebrations at the bar.

Thanks to everyone who helped organise this event and especially to Chris for setting up, Dan for operating sound and light, the performers for entertaining us and setting the mood and all the lovely bar helpers without whom the evening would have been very very dry! If you missed this Social, make sure you come to the next one on Saturday 28th June 2012!

Next season so far includes:

6 -13 November 2012

Biloxi Blues by Neil Simon directed by Gerry McCrudden

10 -17 November 2012

The Price by Arthur Miller directed by Rod Lewis

6 -9 December 2012

Hansel and Gretel by Helen Nelder

NEW YEARS EVE PARTY

19-26 January 2013

Old Times by Harold Pinter (license tbc) directed by Steven O'Shea

23 February -2 March 2013

How to disappear completely and never be found again

by Fin Kennedy directed by Ian Black

30 March -6 April 2013

Boston Marriage by David Mamet, directed by Jerry Lyne

Unfortunately we just heard a few days prior to the event that the license for Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf is restricted and we are looking for a suitable Festival Production.

23-26 May 2013

Improvisation Evenings by Andrew Allen & Co

15 -22 June 2013

New work created by Sarah Davies & Co

20-27 July 2013

A collection of one act plays directed by new directors who are embarking on the NVT director's seats in July's 10 minute play competition. Plays and directors to be confirmed for their experience of directing this July.

As in previous seasons we will add workshops, training and additional treats throughout the season, so watch this space!

Ulrike, Artistic Director

Notes & Plans from our Artistic Director

NO CLASSES IN MAY!

Theatre Practitioners 4, 11, 18 and 25 June

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.

Find your inner clown - Andy Thomas

2, 9, 16, 23 and 30 July

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.

Youth Theatre

The request of working with younger members and offering training and performances has been raised several times and some members expressed an interest in getting involved in such a project and supporting the development of a youth theatre group. If you would like to support such an undertaking and have any ideas or skills to offer, please contact me so I can arrange a meeting to discuss things further. As we all know, the future of our theatre depends on new members developing skills and getting involved and what better opportunity than 'growing' this NVT future?

I look forward to hearing from you

Ulrike

Artistic Director

ulrike.schilling@newventure.org.uk

10 minute play competition

For this year's 10 minute play competition we received over 170 entries, many of which were of high standard and entertained the readers for many hours and days.

The competition is hosted by Sussex Playwrights and NVT and both organisations provided three readers each, who read the scripts, marked them and finally selected 20 entries which then were read by the eight directors to get the final selection.

Whilst some plays were judged by the six readers in very similar ways others created interesting discussions, which could have turned the selection process easily into a very long evening.

Based on the quality and quantity of the entries as well as the interest in directing a 10 minute play, our July production promises to be a success already.

Make sure you do not miss the Auditions or get involved backstage.

Ulrike

Story tellers . . .

. . . are wanted for NVT's fringe festival live fiction event

'Once Upon A Time In Brighton' 25th and 26th May, 7.45pm.

Two nights of winning short stories selected from our competition on the theme of *Brighton - Past, Present and Future*. If

you are interested in joining our team of talented storytellers

please contact Sarah Charsley at *brightonnewshound*

@hotmail.co.uk

JUNE 2012 newsletter

Copy deadline: Monday 14 May

Printing: Monday 28 May

Stuffing & Posting: Saturday 2 June

The rise and fall of a little set

Once in while I am asked to design the set for a New Venture production. "Little Voice" was the tenth time I have been tempted enough or flattered enough to say yes. It apparently doesn't take much to persuade me. Usually, just the combination of an attractive script and a clever director – or should that be vice versa? I am happy either way. When Pat Boxhall asked if I would be interested in taking a look at "Little Voice", the decision was easy but it was a departure from the sort of play I normally like to take on. It needed, for want of a better expression, "proper" scenery. It is true, we see a lot of plays requiring multiple locations at the New Venture and they have been designed very inventively for the small space in the past. After all, we have two black cubes which, over the years, have successfully symbolized everything from nightclubs to historic battle grounds. Two black cubes which have had more roles than Shelagh Baker. However, "Little Voice" was likely to be a little bit beyond even their versatility. In short, it had to be exactly the kind of set that, at the New Venture Studio, I don't usually recommend doing. Multi-levelled, realistic (ish), and big.

The first phase for me is always to alert the team who have backed me up for some time now. Tony "yes, we can manage that" Shoesmith, Richard "put a couple more screws in" Gamper and Natasha "I don't eat or sleep" Borg were all availability checked as, without them I could not have taken it on. Lots of coffee and chat followed – that is the fun bit. After reading the script and doodling a little, it is time for "the sketch". To the untrained eye, it may look like a five-minute scribble. After all, it isn't even coloured in. (That's okay though, I can worry about that later.) However, the sketch has many purposes. Firstly, it shows the director that you have read the play and, secondly, made some attempt to understand it. But most scarily of all, it commits you, if the director likes it, to delivering. Forget what I said about the coffee and chat, it is the initial doodling that is the fun bit as there does

not need to be any attention paid to budget, timescale or basic rules of nature. The sketch, on the other hand, is the opposite. So when it is ready, it is very important to sell it well. This is why – and this is my top tip to other NVT designers – when showing the sketch to the director, always take them to a really good coffee bar. It doesn't have to be expensive but it must be somewhere with a creative atmosphere. I don't know of a single design meeting which I have had in a branch of Subway which has ended well. So I chose to meet Pat at Recipease. And, it probably was as much to do with Jamie Oliver's contemporary bohemian decor as with my drawing but Pat liked it, liked the ideas and was excited. She even bought the coffee. Now that's what I call a successful design meeting.

The next task is the model. The model is a painful process. Forget what I said a minute ago – the model is so painful it makes even the sketch feel like the fun bit. The model is built to scale, essentially to make sure you know everything fits. However detailed the sketch may be, rather than drawing the New Venture Studio, you can quickly realize you have actually drawn Tiananmen Square. As I started, it became apparent that scenery obstructed entrances and audience sightlines and, perhaps more crucially, poked a few feet through the roof. These were exactly the sorts of problems you don't have when designing with the two black cubes. I berated myself for choosing not to use them and set about the redesign. It is worth pointing out that there is an enjoyable inevitability about the design changing all the way through the process. Changing in response to director, lighting designer and actor requirements is the proof that the project is alive. The model is nothing more than a set of promissory notes you give to the director. It is your contract stating the very least of what you will provide. As the needs of the

production change, so must the design. Which in some small way is my excuse for why, and I'm a little embarrassed to admit it, like the sketch, it is not even coloured in. (That's okay though, I can worry about that later.) At this point, as my set of promises to Pat was feeling worryingly ambitious and it was



clear that my budget forecast was going to read more like Noah's shopping list, it was time for only one thing – go to see Tony. This brings me to my second tip for designers out there – that whenever anybody tells you "we've got enough wood for that", remember that we probably do, but 95% of it is in pieces no bigger than 2 foot long. An x-ray of the "Little Voice" set would have looked like Tetris for the deranged. Every time wood is bought for a show, it gets cut to size and then each time a new show uses it, it gets trimmed a little bit shorter and so on and so on. If you are lucky, the show before yours has just gone shopping and you can find reasonable lengths of fresh timber in the storage room. If you are unlucky, you will find yourself tip-toeing through piles of splintered chippings like the Queen Mother in the blitz.

As Tony and Richard appeared surprisingly relaxed about what we wanted to achieve, we began the build. This is where we all find out just how delusional we have been up until this point. The build phase feels like being relentlessly bungeed between joy and disaster. For every glimmer of hope that appears just



Spotlight on Kevin Moore, Production Manager

within reach like a beautiful chocolate, there is a disappointing reality ready to smack the back of your hand with a ruler. "Oh great, we have enough architrave for the whole set. Yay. But it's in seven different styles. Boo. The paint room is jam-packed with paint. Yay. But all of it is lilac. Boo. We have found a fantastic carpet. Yay. Which unravels into several separate and crazy shaped pieces. Boo." Nothing can prepare you for that specific span of skills you will utilize during a set build at the NVT. It is a bit like being a junior worker on the Pisa tower construction project. "I don't understand, it was straight when I left it last night."

Don't worry, Richard Gamper yanked it and it didn't move any more. But he did say stick a couple more screws in just to be sure."

The build was a long process made enjoyable from the involvement and skills brought by Tony, Richard and Natasha. I can't stress enough just how invaluable it has been to draw on

Tony's knowledge of just about everything, Richard's commitment and ingenuity and Natasha's unflappable artistry. We wanted to be finished in time for "Wizzle and Mince" but the set remained unpainted for some time as I couldn't decide what colours it should be. I couldn't help thinking that this may have been just a little easier if at any point during the process I had simply coloured something in. We live



and learn. So, we spent a few long days, always cheered on by complementary noises made by the cast whenever they saw signs of progress -and even when they didn't see any progress but assumed, that because we looked rather tired, that progress must have happened somewhere- and an always appreciative director and the set was complete. Even then, after the first public performance, we tried to change it slightly to make more impact at a particular moment. The change didn't work but it is important to try.

Finally, after several months in the planning, seeing the cast use the set as you and the director had intended is always the most gratifying part. In fact, forget everything I've said up until now – when the cast and crew do their thing and create such an enjoyable show- THAT is the fun bit. Being part of a collaborative team is the fun bit. Seeing an audience enjoy the show- I guess that's why I keep being tempted back.

Tim McQuillen-Smith

Why did you decide to join NVT?

I recently moved back to Sussex and looked around for theatres, and this one seemed the most welcoming.

How long have you been a member?

I'm very new, I only joined last June.

What have been the highlights for you?

Stage managing *The Servant* taught me a lot about organisation. It was a big but satisfying task making sure everything was in exactly in the right place and changing the sets.

What does your current role involve/cover?

As Production Manager I arrange the booking of spaces within the theatre, mainly for rehearsals, and chair meetings for upcoming shows. I generally oversee how the shows are doing in the run up to performance.

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

Stage managing has been fun, I'm looking forward to directing.

What are your major interests outside of NVT?

I read a lot. My bedside table has 20 books on it that are at various stages of being read at the moment.

What has been your greatest life achievement?

When I was 16 I wrote, directed and acted in a three-hander play, involving 20 different characters with the three of us playing multiple roles. It dealt with the machinations of a high rise office block with each level going up a strata in the company, each level being envious of the one above, until it reaches the boss who's the only one who knows the business is going to bust, and envies the tramp on the street outside for his more simple lifestyle. I've since lost the script which is a shame. Been downhill ever since.

What are you looking forward to at NVT?

All sorts. Stage managing *Medea* is the next thing coming up. I'm also going to be directing one of the ten minute plays in June.

The Rise and Fall of Little Voice

Reviewed by **Barrie Jerram**

Jim Cartwright's play tells the story of an agoraphobic young girl grieving for her father, who consoles herself by listening to and impersonating the great divas featured on his record collection.

She rarely leaves her bedroom and, on the few occasions that she does speak to her mother, she does so with such a soft voice that she is referred to as LV – Little Voice.

The mother, Mari, is a horrendous creation – rarely sober, dresses like a tart and acts like one, picking up men in her constant search for “the real one” who will bring her security. She has a vile mouth that is constantly directed at LV who tries to drown her out with her music.

Ray Say, a local theatrical agent with a string of tacky acts, is her latest boy friend and when he overhears LV singing in her room he realises that he has a potentially money making star he can exploit. Using the mother he wheedles away until he manages LV to agree to perform in a local nightclub run by the cheesy Mr Boo. She manages a string of performances but eventually the pressure is too much for the fragile girl and she breaks down on the night that a TV producer is in the audience.

A sub-plot involves a young telephone engineer, Billy, who eventually rescues her. Cartwright has created a gallery of odious characters for whom there can be little sympathy with the exception of LV and Billy.

The play not only launched its star, Jane Horrocks, to fame but it also set down a challenge to future actors. In addition to acting skills there must be an

extra requirement – the ability to sing and re-create Garland, Springfield and Bassey et alia. It is an ability that is crucial and without it the play falls apart. A mimed performance would not work – the play would lose its hair-raising impact.

Director, Pat Boxall struck gold with Jenny Lee-Delisle who rose to the challenge and surpassed all expectations. Hers was a magnificent portrayal – a cowering creature with eyes full of fear and terror that transforms into a confident powerhouse when she takes on the persona of her idols and starts singing. Her eight and a half minute cabaret spot was a tour de force and was matched by a nightmarish reprise as she undergoes her breakdown. On both occasions goose bumps were raised as they were when her anger and true voice break out allowing her to crush her mother and dismiss her.

“. . . a galaxy of acting talent . . .”

But this was not just a one-woman show – a galaxy of acting talent surrounded her. Lex Hills as Mari was repulsively hypnotic as she successfully brought out the worst of the character – an alcoholic, sex mad, selfish slut who allows the exploitation of her daughter's talent in the pursuit of her own happiness and security. Even her word patterns and occasionally slurred delivery identified Mari's horribly disorganised mind. The performance made Mari truly loathsome. It was a pleasure to see Lex back on stage again after too long an absence.

There were other fine performances. David Peaty looked the part of as the seedy agent playing up to Mari who he scathingly dis-

misses as his dream collapses. The ferocious tirade was brutally delivered. The ever reliable Andy Bell excelled as the cheesy nightclub owner. His nightclub patter and jokes reeked of desperation. Debbie Frisby, as the neighbour, Sadie, gave a nicely studied cameo. Forever the butt of Mari's cruel jokes she ends the play with the last laugh, literally – she stands at the doorway, sniggering as Mari sobs. Culann Smyth made a brief but effective appearance as the Phone Man.

But it was Frank Leon as Billy that was a revelation. He had previously demonstrated his talent for caricature earlier in the year in *Four Play* but here he gave a rounded performance that was a delight. He had touching simplicity that matched *Little Voice's*. He was full of gauche adolescent awkwardness as he tried to convey Billy's feeling for LV. Their tender scenes together were eye moistening beautiful.

Pat Boxall proved once again that she has the Midas touch when it comes to directing. Apart from her choice in casting she was on the button in staging the play and coaxing the best from her players. Praise to her technical team for their major contributions. I am constantly amazed at the effective sets that get squeezed into the studio's limitations and the split set, crucial for this production, was cleverly realised. Even the lighting team had added responsibilities with the constantly exploding fuse box.

Director, cast and crew can justly take pride in what emerged as a classy production.

Barrie Jerram



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