

Next
Month:

"Love Letters"
22-29 October
By A.R. Gurney
Directed by
Strat Mastoris

Box Office (24hr)
01273 746118
Other enquiries
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NEW VENTURE
T H E A T R E

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www.newventure.org.uk

'The Servant'

By Robin Maugham
Directed by Ken Potter
1-8 October 2011



"... I'm the boss down here and it's me that gives the orders if there's any orders to be given."

The cancellation of the June production of *The Servant* owing to the leading man having to drop out at the last minute was a bitter blow not only to us but, judging by the amount of enquiries received, also to many members. However, in the best of showbiz traditions, the NVT grasped the nettle, decided the show must go on, and rescheduled. My warmest thanks to them. Cast and crew have now had an infusion of outstanding new talent to replace members who could not commit to the rescheduled dates and the company is stronger than ever. We can't wait to get it on!

Any mention of *The Servant* usually conjures up memories of the superb Harold Pinter-scripted film classic starring Dirk Bogarde and James Fox, directed by Joseph Losey. Many believe the story to be of Pinter's own making. In reality, his screenplay had its origins in a novella written by Robin Maugham in 1948. At the time, the book was considered risqué. It was an outstanding success and in 1958, wishing to capitalise further on his controversial oeuvre, Maugham decided to turn the story into a play. Pinter's screenplay came along a few years later in 1963. It's amusing to note that, although Maugham always thought the book a 'natural' for the cinema, he was advised by a film censor in the early 1950s that, because of the story's dubious content, he would never see it made into a film in his lifetime.

Robin Maugham's life reads like fiction. Nephew of literary giant, William Somerset Maugham - 'Uncle Willie' - he at times hobnobbed with the rich and famous then at other times wallowed in deep despair, alcoholism, and loneliness, tormented by dark dreams. He fought in

the Western Desert, was mentioned in despatches, suffered shrapnel lodged in his brain in tank warfare. An expert in Middle East affairs, he became a friend and advisor to Sir Winston Churchill and for a while courted his daughter, Mary. After the war he took up a



L. to R. Matthew Houghton and Colin Elmer

post as an 'unofficial secret intelligence officer' with a 'cover' as a journalist. In 1960, he was buried alive then miraculously rescued from the rubble in the Agadir earthquake disaster. Drawing upon this wealth of experience he produced a rich panoply of writing - short stories, novels, plays, films, biographies - earning acclaim from the leading critics of the day. 'An expert and ingenious storyteller,' stated the Sunday Times in 1955.

Nowhere was his ingenuity more obvious than in his magnum opus, *The Servant*. In this production, Matt Houghton very capably steps into the central role of Tony, the rich, insouciant Chelsea socialite. It's been a couple of years since NVT audiences have had the chance to see Matt but previous appearances were in *Our Country's Good*, *Strangers on a Train*, *Mojo*, and *Festen*. Attending to Tony's every need and exerting a subtle, insidious

Continued on page 3 column 2

Jill Felix
1934-2011
Greatly missed

Tributes—pages 4 & 5

AGM

7.30 pm

2 November 2011

News from our Artistic Director

NVT Season 2011-2012

Season Opening Social 2011 - 17 September at 7:30pm

Make sure you don't miss the Social on Saturday 17th September 2011 at 7:30 pm. Let's start our new season with a bang!

As usual this is a great opportunity to talk to directors about the upcoming productions, meet new faces and catch up with old friends.

Also we'll be presenting the NVT awards for the sea-

son 2010-2011, and your vote really counts!

Furthermore you'll be able to see all the refurbishments made to the theatre over the summer to ensure we're well prepared for the next amazing season!

Looking forward to seeing you on the 17th.

Ulrike

New Season updates

On Saturday 30 July 2011 most of the directors of the season 2011-2012 met and discussed the new season. We spoke about the variety of the upcoming season and its challenges. Many directors are already filling crew positions, so get in there whilst you can!

Due to license issues we had to change our festival show and will now produce Tennessee Williams "A Streetcar Named Desire".

We already received the first entries for the "10 Minute Play Competition" and would like to encourage all writers in the membership to let their creativity spark.

This was followed by the **End-of-Season Social** in the evening.

Around fifty members came to celebrate the success of last season and to selflessly ensure the bar stock was run down for the summer break!

It was lovely to see members popping in and catching up with recent events. The atmosphere was very relaxed and enjoyable and the bar was busy.

Thanks to everyone who helped behind the bar to make this evening a success. Chris Pugh kindly created a presentation of images from last season's productions, most of them taken by Strat, which was projected in the South Hall. The Projection throughout the evening worked very well and sparked many conversations about last season.

Congratulations again to Tony Shoesmith, Michael Yates and Richard Connolly for their luck in the Raffle!

1-8 October 2011

The Servant by Robin Maugham
directed by Ken Potter

22-29 October 2011

Love Letters by A. R. Gurney
directed by Strat Mastoris

19-26 November 2011

Iron by Rona Munro
directed by Jerry Lyne

10-17 December

Talking Dog (working title)
devised & directed
by Sarah Davies & Co

21-28 January

Gangster No.1
by Louis Mellis & David Scinto
directed by Steven O'Shea

18-25 February 2012

The Permanent Way
by David Hare
directed by Kirsty Elmer

31 March-7 April 2012

The Rise and Fall of Little Voice
by Jim Cartwright
directed by Pat Boxall

5-19 May 2012

A Streetcar named Desire
by Tennessee Williams
directed by Mark Wilson

16-23 June 2012

Medea by Euripides
directed by Andrew Allen

14-21 July 2012

10 Minute Play Competition
New writing staged at NVT

Front of House Managers

To aid the smooth running of our productions and events we have decided to try a different approach to the provision of Front of House Managers. A number of willing and experienced members have been approached and have agreed to cover one performance for each production - see the list below.

As you will see there is still one evenings that has not been filled and if you are interested please let us know. The cover for Bar and Fire Steward will continue in the same way as before.

Many thanks to those who have signed up and those who have agreed to cover the one-off events.

Front of House Staffing 2011/2012

1st Saturday evening	Ulrike Schilling
Sunday afternoon	Mark Wilson
Tuesday evening	Jerry Lyne
Wednesday evening	Pat Boxall
Thursday evening	Dan Walker
Friday evening	VACANT
2nd Saturday evening	Ian Black

If you are interested in filling the Friday vacancy, please contact ulrike.schilling@newventure.org.uk.

Acting Class

19, 26 September, 3, 10 and 17 October
Find your mark, look the other fellow in the eye, and tell the truth — James Newton

These classes will explore what it means to exist in the moment on stage, through a series of exercises and text work we will explore the techniques used in professional theatre to create a moving and truthful performance. The sessions will in the main be practical and tailored to those who have previous experience.

Ulrike Schilling

Here we are another season over and a very successful one too. We have our launch of the new season social event on Saturday 17 September, as part of this we will have the NVT Awards for the 2010/11 season.

Enclosed with this newsletter is a voting form, additional forms are available in the theatre and online - www.newventure.org.uk. Online voting will close on Friday 16 July, but you will have a window of opportunity at the beginning of the launch of the new Season Social to cast your votes.

As with last year voting is open to all members - Friend,

Full Company, Student, Unwaged and Life. So please ensure you are current with your membership. The Trustees have agreed be excluded from the Greatest Contribution - non production; as if they would have got a vote anyway.

Gaelle Petit, our prospective treasurer, has agreed to undertake the count as she is the only member of the committee who has not been directly involved with a production this season, so thanks to her for volunteering. Below is a reminder of the awards and the productions you may have seen this season.

Ian Black

Awards

Best Production
Best Actor / Male Performer
Best Newcomer on Stage
Most Innovative Production
Best Lighting Design
Best Make-up Design
Best Poster Design

Best Direction
Best Actress / Female Performer
Best Back Stage Team
Best Set Design
Best Costume Design
Best Sound Design
Greatest Contribution - non production

Productions 2010/2011

Of Mice and Men
The Steamie
The Well
Lie With Me
Four Play
connection unsecure: continue?

Gaby Goes Global
Speed The Plow
Fake
All My Sons
Woman in Mind

'The Servant' continued from page 1

control over his master is Colin Elmer's manservant - utterly meticulous, coolly manipulative, effortlessly menacing. Weaving around this powerful core duo and vying for status and control are the rest of the fine cast - Arabella Gibbins, Terry Drew, Sarah Charsley, and Sarah Deas.

My thanks once again to Ulrike Schilling, Kirsty Elmer, Hannah Liebeskind, Strat Mastoris and Tamsin Fraser who should receive NVT medals of honour for outstanding and selfless supportive action in the call of duty and to everyone else who has made this show possible.

Maugham's happiest years were spent in a regency house in Brunswick Terrace, Hove, where he partied constantly with the likes of Graham Greene, Sir Terence Rattigan, and Gilbert Harding of *What's My Line* fame.

He died in Brighton Hospital March 13, 1981.

Ken Potter

Jill Felix 1934-2011

With the passing of Jill Felix, the Theatre with its membership of both past and present actors and audiences, will remember with much affection and gratitude, a well loved and respected lady.

Jill was introduced to the Theatre nearly 30 years ago by one of our actors, who thought Jill's secretarial skills, drive, energy and common sense would be useful to us. How right she was.

During Jill's years with us she took on so many essential roles that are absolutely vital to the running of the Theatre. She encompassed being a committee member, our Secretary, Stage Manager for so many, many, productions and then for many years served as our Front of House Manager which included running the Bar. To my knowledge there was more than one occasion when Jill managed to combine both these latter tasks and still manage to keep her sanity. Remember too that the Bar wasn't the glorious edifice it is now. Each night the then "bar table" had to be set up, with bottles, shorts, mixers etc which had to be displayed and assorted glasses produced. In her capacity as Bar Manager, she was there for **every** performance right up until past closing time, for **every** run of the season and in more recent years, when she was also caring for her elderly Mother, would bring her along too. Jill always ensured that no matter what problems she might be facing, the Theatre should never be let down.



So many of us can remember Jill during the run of a production, clutching her work sheet and asking every cast member to do their Front of House stint - including the Bar - for the following production. To ensure the continued smooth running no excuses were accepted, and woe betide anyone who did not respond! She was also a valued member of the Stuffing Team - Newsletters just don't get filled and posted by magic - and many happy lunch parties were held in Jill's home. She even, with much reluctance, took on two stage roles, one playing the family retainer in our original production of Hedda Gabler, and Lady Montague in Romeo and Juliet. On both occasions she vowed never again!

In more recent years when her health declined, Jill moved to Wineham to be with her daughter Nicky and family. It was there that she passed peacefully away with her family around her. At her funeral which many NVT members attended, her daughter made special reference to the many years with us which Jill had enjoyed.

So did we Jill.

With much love and gratitude

Sheelagh Baker

On behalf of the NVT Committee

The Stuffing Club

It was Jill Felix's brilliant idea to form the Stuffing Club.

Up till then, the monthly newsletter envelopes were stuffed in a rather cramped Box Office, heated only by a one-bar electric fire. Jill had the brain-wave of transforming it into a monthly lunch in people's homes. Since Jill herself was an excellent cook, this quickly became very popular and encouraged the six or seven others concerned to pull out the stops to see who could provide the most interesting menu.

Unintentionally, it became an exclusive Club and it was an honour for "outsiders" to be included. Sometimes directors looking for a good meal would arrive unannounced with "last-minute" leaflets.

Jill was a staunch supporter of NVT productions. Woe betide anybody she thought less than generous about a show.

We shall all miss her.

Barry Hewlett-Davies

Our production of 'Women in Mind' was dedicated to Jill - and the collection for "Beating Bowel Cancer" raised over £47.

The charity have expressed their thanks.

Jill's daughter, Nicky, has asked us to pass on her thanks to all the people who sent condolences, and to say how pleased she was with the dedication.

Some farewells to Jill

"Lots of lovely cheeky memories"

Peta Taylor

"She was a fab person"

Jenny Bennett

"Bugger!"

Janet H-D

"How very sad. What an amazing person."

Lex Hills

"Very sad news indeed."

Mike Chowney

"How very sad. Happy memories."

Penny Griffiths

"Such energy and drive which it makes it all the harder to accept".

Mark Wilson

"We've lost one of the original stalwarts ."

Linda Potter

"Maybe nobody is irreplaceable but she is sorely missed"

Charles Gilson

Since the last production in July there has been a lot of work going on at the theatre. Following a mountain of forms and permissions we have eventually been able to realise some of the improvements planned for the South Hall and Studio.

As I write this the South Hall floor is being replaced. At last an end to the creaking and squeaking of old floorboards that have dogged the backstage movements of cast, crew and front of house alike for some time. Now we have a new floor of reclaimed seasoned timber that will hopefully last another hundred plus years.

The Studio has also had some attention, with the windows being painted inside, double glazed and

covered with new blinds. In addition a new Climate Control system is being installed, which will improve the environment for both rehearsals and performances. We thank the Arts Council for a fifty percent grant towards the work in the Studio, which has enabled us to afford these improvements.

It is also important that we should thank those who have turned up during the summer to help with removing the old floor boards, painting the windows etc. Special thanks are due to the small group who have been directly responsible for the planning and implementation of these improvements.

Ian Black

Treasurer co-opted

As you may be aware Ollie Donovan our Treasurer has decided to stand down from the AGM this year. Due to commitments he will not be able to fulfil the treasurer role from 1 September. Therefore the committee has co-opted Gaelle Petit - who has agreed to stand for this role at the AGM - into the role of Treasurer for the next 2 months. She has been shadowing Ollie in her role for a couple of months and the changeover should be quite seamless.

We would like to express our thanks to Ollie for all the hard work he has done over the past two years in the role of Treasurer and in other areas of the theatre that he has become involved.

NVT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2 November - 7.30 pm

Yes, it's that time again. We have arranged this years Annual General Meeting of the New Venture Theatre for Wednesday 2 November, starting at 7:30pm.

Along with the reports, election of trustees and acceptance of those willing individuals into the various crucial roles within the theatre infrastructure - see the attached nomination forms for more details; the agenda will be sent out with the next newsletter - we have the opportunity to look at the developments of the past year and discuss the suggestions for refurbishment of the Main Theatre. Yes, we have discussed this before, but now we have both feedback from the development group set up following last years AGM and a substantial fund raised through the past year with the help of the Gala and an anonymous donation.

So, a definite date for your diary - Wednesday 2 November at 7:30pm - your chance to have your say, be involved in the shaping the future of the main theatre and elect those who will manage the theatre for the next year. Don't miss it!

Design for Donations

Calling all creative design hungry members.

Could you design a bespoke donation container for the NVT?

It has been suggested that the NVT may be missing an opportunity. Audience members should have the opportunity of donating a small amount of cash should they be so inclined.

Therefore the NVT needs a bespoke donation box.

Something that reflects the NVT in some way.

Maybe in Perspex or other transparent material.

The box would need to be secured to the wall, floor etc. and probably located in the entrance foyer. Anyone interested in designing and constructing a donation box please contact one of the committee members.

Correspondence

Dear NVT,

I had hoped to buy a couple of tickets for forthcoming shows at the box office in late July, and made a special journey with the money to do so. I was bemused that it was impossible to make a purchase there and then, being informed by the woman behind the counter that all sales had to be made online. It seems ridiculous that a community theatre should have such a policy, given that I can walk into the Theatre Royal and buy tickets with cash or a Visa card whenever it is open. They also have online facilities, but to augment rather than replace direct sales.

I hope this policy will be changed, as it discourages both those who do not wish to live their whole life online, and anyone who might chance by the theatre one night and be attracted by an eye-catching poster. What's the point of publicity if you turn punters away?

Peter Poole, Hove

Dear Editor,

*When I saw the news that there was to be a **Murder Game at NVT**, I thought "whoopie - that'll be fun!" So, on the night, my partner and I caught an early bus so we could beat the crowds. We figured NVT members would be rioting to get seats at one of the South Hall tables.*

Well, we were able to get a table alright. Yeah, and the other 8 people also were seated comfortably. But gee whiz, where were all the rest of you? You missed a good evening. And it only cost £2. A real bargain.

Mary Jane Birdwhistle

Dear Mr. Poole,

Over the past few years our Box Office facilities have moved a long way into the 21 Century. We still have facilities for those who are unable to book online or by post as was outlined in a recent newsletter. But all of this is undertaken by volunteers. Mr Poole appears to have forgotten that crucial difference between the NVT and Theatre Royal.

Having said this we do try our best to facilitate personal bookings when the Box Office is open, although that is somewhat difficult in the last 15 minutes before a performance; with a queue of people arriving and pressure to start the performance on time.

I cannot say why Mr Poole had such an unpleasant experience when trying to book tickets as he does not indicate the time or circumstances when he was at the theatre. It is always our intention to facilitate booking whenever possible, however, as highlighted above, all this is done by volunteers and therefore we cannot emulate places like the Theatre Royal as far as facilities are concerned; nor are our ticket prices as high as theirs.

I would finally point out that almost all of the background work in managing the box office is undertaken by one person, who gives a lot of her time to ensure members can book by post or even by phone if all other routes are impossible. So let's be positive about the service we have and not look to complain because no one is there to serve at the time you want them to.

Ian Black, Chairman

Barry Hewlett-Davies reviews: *'connection unsecure: continue ?'* a devised piece by Izziy Mackenzie, Ben Pritchard and Mark Wilson

Words, words, words
I'll put my cards on the table.
When the lights came up on Izziy Mackenzie and Ben Pritchard in white face and rehearsal clothes, peering through wooden frames, I prepared myself for one of those "improvised" evenings which slide into self-indulgence if you don't watch out.

How wrong I was. What we got was a beautifully articulated love story.

It took time to set the action. Mark Wilson, the director, uses social electronic networking – sorry about the clunky phrasing but how else to say it? – as his framework. Two wretchedly detached lonely people measure

their social success by the number of "Friends" they clock up on what looks like Facebook. But how real are the Friends?

Over the next 50 minutes we find out. Fifty minutes is the play's natural length because that is the way it naturally developed.

Izziy and Ben ("Frankie" and "Charlie") visit all sorts of situations: comic, violent, drunken, tearful, despairing, hopeful and just plain daft before falling literally into each others' arms. It's wonderful to see them at work, both have such truth to bring to their acting.

As their painted masks gradually melt away, so do their uncertain-

ties and by the end of the piece, you find yourself really wanting them to be happy.

Mark Wilson writes successful radio drama. This play, with its words, words, words, might seem a natural for broadcasting, too – but then you would miss seeing very accomplished actors at work.

There is no judgment of Facebook. It is simply a means to an end. I have a French friend who insists on calling it Fessebouc and I don't believe I need add anything to that.

Devised theatre is a gamble as well as a very lonely experience for the people concerned. You can put your money on this one with absolute confidence.

Alan Ayckbourn's *'Woman in Mind'* – a fantastic journey

Who Shot the Dog? By Barry Hewlett-Davies

On my way out after seeing *Woman in Mind*, I said thank you to a young member of the cast. He asked me if I had enjoyed it. I said "No!" It didn't seem to be the sort of show you could claim to "enjoy." My reaction was over the top and I had better apologise. I had fallen (again) for Ayckbourn's craftsmanship and a truly successful production of one of his darkest comedies.

The story seems straightforward enough. We are in classic Ayckbourn middle class territory – vicar's wife becomes totally disorientated as her marriage falls to pieces around her. The action takes place mostly in her head as a fantasy family takes over from her real one. That the imaginary people are just as nasty as the real thing makes her situation even more heartbreaking.

Ayckbourn says the more fond of people he becomes, the more amusing he tends to find them. You have to hang on to this idea in *Woman in Mind*: as we tread deeper and deeper into the clumsy way the family treat each

other, the more horribly comic they are.

Everything about Pat Boxall's production feels right. The show is good to look at and she has a first-rate cast.

Their strength is in their consistency. No matter how unlikely their situation, they always remain in character. The final alarming fantasy when the wedding turns into a race meeting has the authenticity of one of those dreams where impossible events are accepted without question.

Tessa Pointing is the vicar's wife. To say it is her evening, is not to cut down anyone else's achievement and her performance is entirely truthful. At the show I saw, she had several members of the audience in tears. Her "real" husband, the vicar, is David Peaty, a self-regarding obtuse pomp of a man you long to pour a bucket of water over. Lovely!

Much the most real of the "real" people is Dan Walker, the son. Though we've heard some weird

things about him before he arrives, he turns out to be the most sympathetically normal of the lot and you feel grateful to have him for his ordinariness. The imaginary family, Nik Hedges, Myles Locke, and Sarah Lauridsen, come over as a smug gang who might have stepped straight out of an out-of-date romantic novel, and are a joy.

There is a bewildered out-of-his-depth GP, played by Bob Ryder, whose well-meaning botch-ups lead only to further disaster, and an irritating sister-in-law (Tess Gill) dispensing uneatable food before turning into an unbelievably pregnant cocktail waitress, both of them first-rate.

The production is dedicated to the memory of Jill Felix – a good evening in the theatre, one of NVT's best for some time, and a very good example of successful ensemble playing.

The play dates from 1986.

I never have been certain who shot the dog.

Our sponsors

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