

# NEW VENTURE

T H E A T R E

COMING SOON | **BENEFACTORS** by Michael Frayn | directed by Tess Gill | 20 - 28 March

## THE PRIVATE EAR & BLACK COMEDY

by Peter Shaffer | directed by Dan Walker & Ian Black | 20 - 28 February



Michael Bramley  
& Scott Roberts

Photo by Dan  
Walker

### The Private Ear

Sir Peter Shaffer is well known for weighty scripts such as 'Equus' and 'Amadeus', but as I found out, he also writes what could be simply described as 'domestic comedy'. 'The Private Ear' is one of his earliest, originally starring Maggie Smith and Kenneth Williams in the Globe Theatre.

In 1960's London, classical musical enthusiast Bob has a big date with Doreen, The Perfect Woman. Not knowing much about entertaining, Bob has invited ladies' man Ted along as cook and moral support; that's an unusual move to be sure and Doreen might not be all she seems. As the music swells, what could possibly go wrong?

Recent sitcoms have developed the sub-genre of 'embarrassment humour' - the kind that has you hiding your face in your hands even as you giggle. Shaffer was mining this decades earlier; what was topical and current is now a period piece... but the knuckle-clenching awkwardness and clumsy attempts at romance are eternal. We have all been Bob and Doreen and we have all envied a Ted. It's much easier to laugh

when you're on the outside though. Three excellent actors - Isabel Rofe-Silvester, Scott Roberts and Steve Larkin - make me laugh constantly and I know they will do the same for you.

*Dan Walker*

### Black Comedy

This is a fun one act play, making up the second half of this Peter Shaffer Double Bill. The play is a farce set in the mid 1960's, with Brindsley, a poor sculptor who hopes to sell some of his work to the millionaire art collector George Bamberger; he also intends to ask his Colonel Melkett, Carol's father, for her hand in marriage. He has borrowed, without permission, some of his neighbour Harold's antique furniture in an attempt to impress. The evening is set, but marred by the appearance of a Miss Furnival, a neighbour, the unexpected return of Harold, and the surprise arrival of Brindsley's ex. Add to this the twist that it takes place in a flat in London, which suffers a power cut.

The cast are a mix of new to the NVT, some returners and some frequent flyers, so to speak. Brindsley - Michael Bramley; Carol - Arwen Matthews; Miss Furnival - Liz Stapleton; Colonel Melkett - Andy Thomas; Harold Goringe - Nick Richards; Clea - Lucy Mepstead; Schuppanzigh - Jazz Bowden & George Bamberger - Geoff Goble.

Along with a great supporting team in both design, tech and backstage. This play has been a joy to rehearse over the past couple of months. We hope you enjoy it as much as we have.

*Ian Black*

Photo 2. Findon Shevlin, Trevor Scales & Tom Slater

Photos by Tamsin Fraser

So what's the best way to spend New Year's Eve? Do you meet up with family, reflecting about the events (and hopefully the triumphs) of the year? Or do you go out and find a great party, with entertainment and really loud music, and dance the New Year in?

At New Venture Theatre we managed to combine both. Tamsin Fraser and Debbie Waldon organised our New Year's Eve event, billed as 'The Night Before The Morning After', with a host of NVT stalwarts providing the show. Over a hundred of us had a great evening and the whole thing felt like - a family party.

Every great show needs an anchor, and we of course had the incomparable Gerry McCrudden as MC for the evening. Gerry's a real showman, and his wit and humour brought the evening to life. He can sing, too, and at one point he and Fintan Shevlin did a hilarious spoof on a budget airline called 'Flights for Fifty Pee'.

There was quite a lot of singing, in fact. Fintan started the evening off on his own with a show tune - see, he doesn't just sing in 'Hedwig!' - and was followed by Brian Gannon of Brighton and Hove (actually) Gay Men's Chorus, who belted out a couple of numbers, with a very professional stage presence and a very loud delivery - he didn't actually need the microphone. At all.

There should be a bit of seasonal content in this kind of event, and we were served up 'Curry Favour', a short play written by Debbie Waldon. Despite helping to organise the whole New Year's event, she still found time to direct Warren Saunders and Steve Coulson as two turkeys just before Christmas. Frank Leon and Johnny Parlett then performed as a pair of detectives looking for their erstwhile colleague, a sort of Moriarty character, in a piece that owed more than a passing nod to Conan Doyle. We had stand-up too; Geoff Goble gave us a memorable ten minutes of jokes and one-liners, and then another seasonal offering, from Fascinating Aida this time - a song called 'Don't be a c\*\*t at Christmas'.



## NEW YEAR'S EVE AT NVT

Tom Slater, Fintan Shevlin and Trevor Scales (who we last saw in 'Amongst Barbarians') gave us 'authentic English folk singing' with a West Country ditty about 'The Mole Catchers', with string tied round their trousers at the knee, and chewing straws. Lou and Moog (or Mr and Mrs Gravett) and the rest of band from 'Hedwig and the Angry Inch' then kept the place throbbing until the count-down to Midnight and New Year with numbers from the show, and more.

Lots of hugs at New Year itself - it was a family event, remember - and the band kept on playing well into 2015. We had a raffle MC'd by Colin Elmer,

with donated unwanted Christmas presents eagerly snapped up by the lucky winners. We eventually got home at about three, but I know that some people didn't get to bed at all.

Well done, Tamsin and Debbie. Happy 2015, New Venture Theatre.

**Strat Mastoris**

# ACTING CLASSES

**9 & 16 February**

Larry Yates - The Empty Stage

**23 February, 2, 9, 16 & 23 March**

Andrew Allen - Making Sense(s) Of Performance

**30 March**

Steven O'Shea - Auditioning

# WORKSHOPS

**7 February 2-5pm**

Introduction to Production & Stage Management

*Workshops are open to NVT members, please email [ulrike.schilling@newventure.org.uk](mailto:ulrike.schilling@newventure.org.uk) to book a place.*



Steve Coulson & Warren Saunders

Photo by Tamsin Fraser

## NEW YEAR FAVOUR

It was years ago that the idea of play writing first entered my tiny brain and some years after that that I did a play writing course. The product of that course was a couple of half-done plays; one of these was to grow up to be 'Curry Favour'.

As 'Curry Favour' had a Christmas setting I wasn't sure what to do with it, and realised too late that the December '10 Minute Play Competition' a year or so ago would have been the perfect setting! So what was I to do with Curry Favour?

When Tamsin Fraser decided to resurrect the NVT New Year party, I offered to help, and during this time I mentioned 'Curry Favour' - Tamsin suggested the party as the perfect place for it. The play was sent to a couple of directors, but Tamsin persuaded me to direct it myself. A first time playwright directing her own work? Could I? Well the wind must have been in the right direction because I decided to give it a go.

Very quickly my cast came together and I was blessed with Warren Saunders and Steve Coulson to play my turkeys, Jonathan and Bill. I told them both that I was new to play writing and directing but neither hesitated; they showed total confidence in me. We quickly came up with a rehearsal schedule and both Warren and Steve worked their wattles off!

Tamsin and her mum, the wonderful Christine Snowden, sprung into action making costumes and everything fell into place.

I can honestly say it was a wonderful experience and one I'll never forget. I was nervous on the night; I knew Steve and Warren would be brilliant but would the audience like my writing? Thankfully the answer was yes and I was thrilled at the amazing feedback I got from so many people.

It was a great start to my new year and I'm not going to stop there. The other unfinished play is being dusted off as we speak and I'm hoping to direct a 10 minute play.

I want to thank my wonderful 'Curry Favour' cast and crew. I'm sure that I'm not the only person at NVT who has such secret ambitions and I would urge you to come forward to find a home for your writing and/ or directing ambitions. To coin a phrase from a certain witch 'if not me, who? If not now, when?' Go on, give it a go!

**Debbie Waldon**

So – Hamlet. A mountain that every dramatic actor of note would wish to climb and indeed a very great many have done so: John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier, David Warner and more recently, Simon Russell Beale and Mark Rylance. Kenneth Branagh directed and starred in the 1996 film version and in a YouTube interview, audible to this day, speaks of the difficulty of all the scenes, those with the Ghost in particular. The mountain is not only very high, but tortuous, with precipitous drops to catch the unwary and more ways to the summit than any drawn up by Wainwright.

Hamlet is one of Shakespeare's most celebrated plays. It has become a happy hunting ground not just for actors, but critics and commentators. Few fictional characters have had such constant analysis: is Hamlet a student of philosophy, an angry young man, a prince of destiny, a madman: how much is he a son, a lover, the heir to a kingdom, a vengeful son of a murdered parent? We ask questions because Hamlet does – in none other of Shakespeare's plays are we, the audience, taken so completely into the confidence of the central character.

Young actor Steven O'Shea fell in love with Shakespeare after watching a touring production of Hamlet directed by Ingmar Bergman and performed entirely in Swedish. Light did not dawn so much as flash, and with lasting brilliance – he was hooked. Bravely, he set about writing an abridged version for the New Venture Theatre, and producing a Hamlet that might run for two hours instead of nearly five.

O'Shea's Hamlet is dubbed 'A Family Tragedy' thus instantly altering the mindset from Danish kingdom to domestic affair. He concentrates on murder, incest, madness and revenge, which constitute the essence of Shakespeare's story. Gone are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the two courtiers who should have escorted Hamlet to England and who must now wait for Tom Stoppard for their next incarnation. Gone is poor Yorick, Fortinbras and Osrice as are sundry gravediggers, officers, lords, ladies, messengers and servants. The Ghost has only one brief independent entry and the Dumb Show in Act III (Sc. 2) disappears completely. Hamlet must double up as the dead spirit of his father.

The tragedy exists in itself. We are in no place and no time. Minimal costumes indicate character, not context or period. Ophelia needs a shredded garment just as Hamlet needs a sword but there

# HAMLET

directed by Steven O'Shea | review by Louise Schweitzer



are few props and the barest scenery. The bleak set with an occasional body, is supremely effective, never more so than in the opening scene when Hamlet lies prone across the floor, requiring the audience to tiptoe past him and occasionally step over. There is a fractional difficulty reconciling the beautiful language of Shakespeare to faintly modern appearance, but no one has ever quite solved that problem and certainly not with pastiche Elizabethan style. Jonny Parlett's solution was to almost throw away the more significant lines so that



1. Jim Calderwood & Jonny Parlett  
 2. Jerry Lyne & Lily Crossfield  
 3. Lily Crossfield

Photos by Jez Bowden



their appearance would not halt the drama by recognition. He did this with a manic intensity, which just stayed this side of madness. Hamlet is not mad – he is sane, but dealing with the extreme emotion of a violent grief. Watching him clutch Gertrude was drama in the extreme and how well Sarah Davies portrays the mixed feelings of love, guilt, sex and indifference. Gertrude is hard to play: she loves Hamlet desperately even when he shouts and fights her and she remains loyal to her new husband despite her son's accusation of murder most foul. But somehow Sarah manages theatrical magic to make us understand why her two husbands and her son remain in thrall to her. She does not understand: she is innocent. And how she breathes modern expression into the famous old lines!

The Claudius of Jim Calderwood is nothing of the kind. Oh, how straightforward he pretends to be, and how calculating and manipulative. His suit and tie give him the appearance of a benevolent banker, but he turns out to be Fred Goodwin. His is a memorable performance for its concealed menace and horrible cunning. In contrast, Jerry Lyne portrays Polonius as an easy-going charmer and a bit of a fool, albeit with some famous lines with which he deals lightly. Similarly, his children never quite rise in stature until they are nearly dead: James Harkness duels with rare and believable skill and Lily Crossfield's mad scene is simply brilliant.

All New Venture plays depend as much upon the production team as the actors and in this case, huge credit to, assistant director Mike Stubbs, sword-fight choreographer Michael Grimwood, lighting operation Alex Epps and James McCauley. The bouquet goes to director, writer and creator of a new Hamlet, Steven O'Shea.

And the rest is silence.

## DIRECTOR'S PROPOSALS

### STILL ACCEPTING PROPOSALS FOR THE 2015/16 SEASON!



What plays we put on at NVT very much depends on what exciting ideas our directors put forward.

The deadline for proposals is the end of February so there's still time to have a good think and then download a Directors' Proposal form for our 2015/16 season from the Newsletter email or NVT website and return it to [art.dir@newventure.org.uk](mailto:art.dir@newventure.org.uk)

If you'd like an initial chat about directing, just get in touch.

**Rod Lewis**

1973

CAST

PHILO	Gerry Whitmore
JEVE TRILS	Ronald Pearl
MARK ANTONY	Derek Masin
CLEOPATRA	Eileen Miller
CHARMIAN	Maria Pope
IRAS	Penny Malsey
LADIES IN WAITING	& Susan Harris
ALEXAS	John Muddle
MESSENGER	Nelson Lindsay
ENOBARBUS	Ronald Newman
SEXTHUS	Roger Hudson
OCTAVIUS CAESAR	John Hughes
AFRILIUS LEPIDUS	Leonard Holloway
SEXTUS POMPEIUS	Gerry Whitmore
MENAS	John Muddle
AGRIPPA	John Muddle
MARDIAN	Ronald Pearl
ROMAN SERVANT	Gerry Whitmore
OCTAVIA	Ronald Newman
LADY IN WAITING TO OCTAVIA	
IRAS	
AMBASSADOR	
IRIDIUS	
MARDIAN	
DECIUS	
DIONYS	
CLOWN	

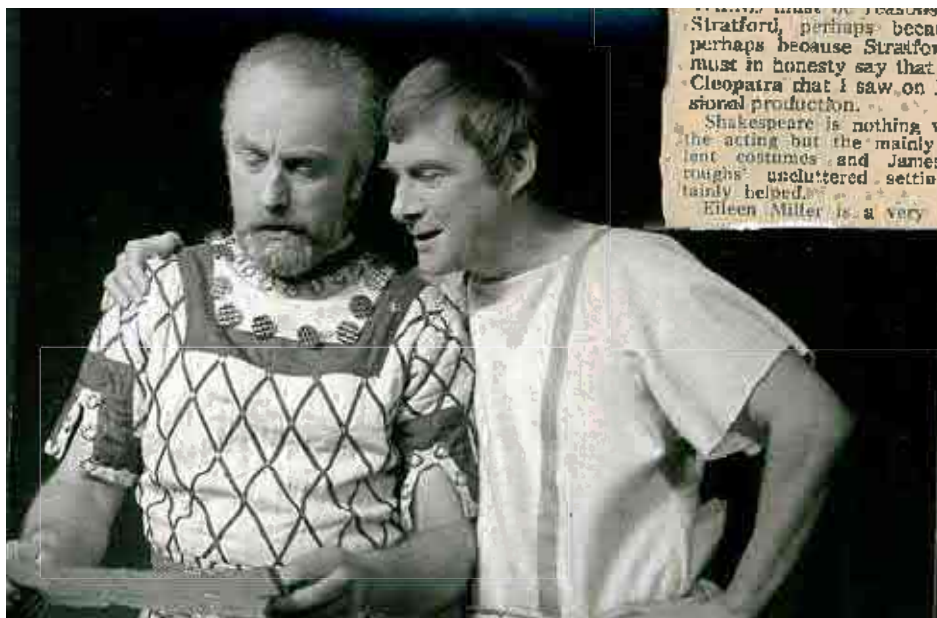
Production No. 174

# WHO DO YOU THINK WE WERE?

Antony and Cleopatra | 1973 | New Venture Theatre

## Cleopatra

THERE must be reasons, perhaps the over-heated atmosphere at Stratford, perhaps because they used a longer version there, perhaps because Stratford was a little overlaid scenically, but I must in honesty say that I enjoyed the New Venture's Antony and Cleopatra that I saw on Monday better than I enjoyed the professional production.



... Stratford, perhaps because they used a longer version there, perhaps because Stratford was a little overlaid scenically, but I must in honesty say that I enjoyed the New Venture's Antony and Cleopatra that I saw on Monday better than I enjoyed the professional production.

Shakespeare is nothing without the acting but the mainly excellent costumes and James Burroughs' uncluttered setting certainly helped.

Eileen Miller is a very human Cleopatra with a sincerity in her amorality that is almost engaging. She gives a performance that is never over-dramatized.

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Eileen Miller is a very human Cleopatra with a sincerity in her amorality that is almost engaging. She gives a performance that is never over-dramatized.

Derek Masin is the infatuated Antony, pig-headed, irascible, torn in his allegiance, and to cap his chain of failures, even an unsuccessful suicide.

It is possible that both must give place to Ronald Newman as Enobarbus. This is indeed a fine performance in a role of great difficulty and . . . do you know what I mean when I say that he never leaves us in doubt? It is a clear and clean-cut portrayal.

Cleopatra's attendants, Charmian and Iras, are well played by Moira Hart and Patricia Pope, and a word of praise for the complete immobility of Penny Malsey and Susan Harris as her ladies in waiting.

John Hughes is a patrician Octavius Caesar, Mollie Faulkner a charming Octavia.

Other parts are played by Gerry Whitmore, Ronald Pearl, John Muddle, Nelson Lindsay, Roger Hudson, Leonard Holloway, Ian Lawrence, Marianne Chown and John Muddle.

If you are an associate member of the New Venture Club do not be put off by the fact that this is one of the more ponderous of Shakespeare's plays. If you can get in tonight or tomorrow do go to see it—you will be pleased that you took my advice.

# CASTINGS

## The Thrill of Love | 24 April - 02 May

This gripping drama takes a fresh look at Ruth Ellis, the last woman to be hanged in Britain. Ruth works in the kind of nightclubs where there's more than just a drink on offer. The girls work hard, play hard and dream of a movie-star life. Then she meets the wealthy, womanising David, a racing driver with whom she becomes obsessed. Fame comes – but not in the way she imagines.

Atmospheric, dark, fascinating and enthralling, this play gets to the core of the incident, of the trial and of the woman who finally broke...

Ruth Ellis  
Jack Gale  
Sylvia Shaw  
Vickie Martin  
Doris Judd

Emmie Spencer  
Matthew Houghton  
Emma Hutton  
Harriet Wakefield  
Pamela Sian Evans

## Parlour Song | 15 - 30 May

Dale Tony Bright  
Joy Sophie Dearlove  
Ned Ben Pritchard

We are still looking for:

Assistant Stage Manager  
Costume Design  
Make up and hair  
Sound Operation  
Props Maker  
Lighting Design  
Lighting Operation  
Sound Design  
Sound Operation

If you would like to get involved, or shadow someone, please contact [ulrike.schilling@newventure.org.uk](mailto:ulrike.schilling@newventure.org.uk)

# NVT TICKET BOOKING INFORMATION

book online at [www.newventure.org.uk](http://www.newventure.org.uk) or by post using the form below

• Ticket prices: £9 (£8 members) Final Fri/Sat £10 (£9 members) First Fri/Tue £8 (£7 members) • Evening performances 7:45pm  
Sundays are Matinees only 2:30pm No performances on Mondays • Please note that access to the Theatre Upstairs is only possible by 4 flights of stairs, and therefore may not be suitable for those with mobility difficulties.

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Cut along the line, and return your completed slip together with a cheque to: New Venture Theatre, Bedford Place, Brighton BN1 2PT

	date	member	standard	total cost
a double bill by Peter Shaffer 'The Private Ear' & 'Black Comedy' 20th - 28th February *Theatre Upstairs				
'Benefactors' by Michael Frayn 20 -28 March Studio				
'Richard III' William Shakespeare 3rd - 4th April Studio rehearsed reading - tickets £5				

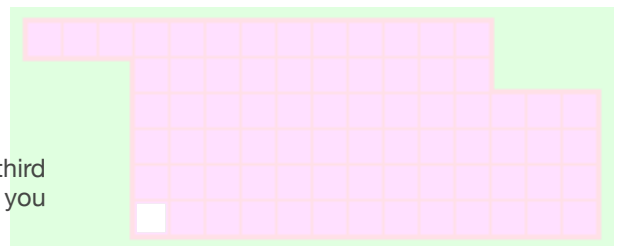
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### \*THEATRE UPSTAIRS ALLOCATED SEATING

Allocated seating is available for productions taking place in the Theatre Upstairs.

Please mark your preferred seat(s) with 1's, and a second and third option with 2's and 3's, in case your first choice is unavailable. If you leave this blank, seats will be allocated for you.

Allocated seating remains unavailable for productions in the Studio.



**S T A G E**

# CONTACT US

Bedford Place  
Brighton BN1 2PT

**General Enquiries** 01273 808353  
info@newventure.org.uk

**Box Office Info** 01273 746118  
boxoffice@newventure.org.uk

www.newventure.org.uk  
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For further information please contact the Angels Coordinator Gerry McCrudden: gerrymccrudden@hotmail.com. If you are a UK tax payer your donation will also benefit from Gift Aid.

### We'd love to hear from you!

Please write in with any comments, articles or reviews of our productions and events to Natasha Borg, Newsletter Editor: newsletter@newventure.org.uk - or by post if you prefer.

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