

# NEW VENTURE

T H E A T R E

COMING SOON | LULU by Frank Wedekind | Directed by Scott Roberts 18 - 27 May

## HUGHIE & THE REAL INSPECTOR HOUND

by Eugene O'Neill & Tom Stoppard | directed by Dan Walker & Mary Allen | 21 - 29 April



Steve Mallen  
& Simon  
Messingham

Photo by Dan  
Walker

### Hughie by Eugene O'Neill

In Eugene O'Neill's 'Hughie', New York is on the cusp of the Great Depression; in its seedy underbelly, small-time gambler Erie is crawling back into his hotel after nights of drunken mourning. The Night-Clerk would rather be somewhere (and someone) else, but to his horror he finds that Erie has many tales to tell. This is a completely honest exploration of a friendship between two people, one of whom is an inveterate liar, and the struggle to make new connections when we feel alone.

O'Neill himself was born in a New York hotel room in October 1888. The first American playwright to receive the Nobel Prize for literature, he may be best known for 1946 drama 'The Iceman Cometh'.

O'Neill wrote Hughie as one of a series of short plays with the theme of eulogies, a collection titled "By Way of Orbit". For unknown reasons the writer chose to burn all manuscripts of these eight plays, bar one.

I found Hughie while searching for plays that could fit some very specific requirements; a two hander by a well-regarded playwright of the 19th or 20th century, with a script of substantial monologues. This turned out to be harder than expected. Our Artistic Director Rod Lewis suggested that I work with Mark Wilson to help me gain experience as a director and we all agreed that the ideal play would allow us to delve deeply into a line-by-line study with our actors. My thanks go to Mark for being an invaluable source of advice and wisdom during planning, casting and rehearsals. We hope that in this production we have set down a framework to help nurture many more new directors at New Venture Theatre.

Right from the start we knew that we needed actors prepared to go on this journey with us, to explore in-depth exactly who these characters are and what their meeting means. We found just what we were looking for in Steve Mallen and Simon Messingham. In addition to being excellent actors they are also my collaborators and if you see directorial choices that you like in this play, then please thank them also. I must also thank Sophie, Leanne, Annique and all of our dedicated and talented crew for supporting us and being an integral part of this performance.

By placing Erie, the Night Clerk and indeed Hughie himself under a microscope, we found what these characters were all looking for at 3am on a dark night in the city: connection to other people.

**Dan Walker**



Des Potton & Alistair Lock (Culann Smyth at front)

Photo by Strat Mastoris

## The Real Inspector Hound by Tom Stoppard

**T**he Real Inspector Hound' is one of Stoppard's funniest plays, a surreal comedy set in a theatre, where an Agatha Christie style whodunit is being performed and watched by two critics, Moon and Birdboot. The play within a play is a take-off of 'The Mousetrap', in which - in the words of theatre director Charles Markowitz - "the actors inherit their roles like malignant tumours".

But what really motors the play into realms of philosophical absurdity are the hapless figures of Moon and Birdboot, the critics obsessed with their own comic agendas. Moon hates being a second-string to the lead critic Higgs and dreams of killing him, while Birdboot is a philanderer, taking actresses out after the show, at the same time maintaining he is faithful to his wife Myrtle.

The play within a play is set in Muldoon Manor, a country house surrounded by 'desolate marshes' and 'treacherous swamps' and is a direct parody of Agatha Christie's 'closed' settings in which no one can enter or leave, so the characters

know that the murderer must be one of them. It opens with a body lying on an otherwise empty stage. Simon, a mysterious young man new in the neighbourhood enters the house, and it is revealed that he has dumped Felicity Cunningham for her friend Cynthia Muldoon, the lady of the house. In the audience Birdboot has mentally done the same.

Eventually Inspector Hound arrives on the scene, apparently searching for a madman, and the company finally notices the body. When they split up to search the house, Simon comes onstage, examines the body and is shot. His death presents another mystery: who killed Simon and why?

Between the acts Moon and Birdboot continue their hilarious soliloquies from their seats in the audience, sometimes about their reviews and sometimes about their obsessions: killing Higgs and Birdboot's newly found passion for Cynthia. As the show continues, both critics are gradually drawn onto the stage, with catastrophic consequences.

The play celebrates Stoppard's word-playing intellectuality, his self-conscious theatricality and his love of reworking pre-existing narratives. In this production we have pared the set down to the bones, to focus the attention on the characters, relentlessly driving the action through two successive (but very different) performances of the play within a play, while the critics soar to ever more funny and pretentious heights in their parodies of criticism.

This production is brought to life by a fabulous cast and crew, to whom many thanks. They have been a pleasure to work with, and have come up with numerous good ideas about the interpretation of Stoppard's words. I hope he would be proud of what we've done.

*Mary Allen*

## QUOTE CORNER

***"A playwright is the litmus paper of the arts. He's got to be, because if he isn't working on the same wave length as the audience, no one would know what in hell he was talking about. He is a kind of psychic journalist, even when he's great."***

**- Arthur Miller**

Write in with your favourite theatrical quote to [newsletter@newventure.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@newventure.org.uk)

Pat Boxall's revival of Rattigan's 'The Deep Blue Sea' follows other Rattigans at the New Venture Theatre. It's a prosc-arch play and the angled design by Simon Glazier, based on Tanya Moiseiwitsch's 1952 original, evokes shabby naturalism – authentic props ooze dreary aplomb. Under Phil Palmer's subdued lighting you take a while to notice the rug on the floor has a body under it. Tim Metcalfe's sound and music is sympathetically non-period, though just in one place unnecessary.

It opens with door-bangings, discovery by married neighbours the Welches. Matthew Davies and Isabella Somerville McCarthy fluster with charcoal comedy over Hester Collyer's attempted suicide. Emmie Spencer's Hester lies sprawled by the gas fire. Mrs Elton the kindly landlady finally reveals former fighter and test pilot Freddie Page who lives with Hester isn't her husband; call for Sir William Collyer. Characters rapidly swirl in threes and eventually duets as various tragedies play out.

Hester has left her affectionate but emotionally frozen high court judge of a husband Sir William (Mark Lester, adamant, with an upthrust chin poked out of a morning suit) for a superficially exciting, equally frozen ex-ace and test-pilot. Freddie Page whose 'life stopped in 1940' has lost his nerve even there, drinks, suffered a crash in Ottawa. Spencer plumbs Hester's erotic despair with a county chameleon set: sang-froid coping, amused dignity, bursts of tear-stained passion, depending on who's addressed.

There's darker comedy too as Neil Drew's Freddie breezes in unaware, then finds the would-be suicide note; everything changes. Hester's reactions to Freddie, off-hand sulky, suddenly passionate, then resignedly casual, exhibit desperate mercurial strategies. Spencer nuances Hester's volatilities, where she staggers out of meltdown into a battered new shape. Spencer's mobile face, often turned from Drew's, says everything about zero minus zero.

This isn't just Hester's tragedy. "We're death to each other Hess" Freddie announces in a rare flash of insight. He accepts a job he's no longer fit for: test pilot in Rio. Unable to answer Hester's erotic passion, feeling wretched for the only person he cares for but can never love, Freddie opts for a death sentence. Drew is superb at conveying Freddie's edgy absorption, shows him no fool, but eternally callow, attracting several women as an *homme fatale*.

## THE DEEP BLUE SEA

by Terence Rattigan | directed by Pat Boxall | review



Drew's wiriness, all caged pacing, conveys a man still young rather than the shabby amplitude of a burned-out pilot in his early thirties, whose tragedy answers Hester's. But the slice of Freddie he does invoke is thrillingly authentic.

The Collyers' encounters elicit greater, less visceral depth, glittering with their dead world; Spencer triumphs. Lester is all bemused tolerance. The first elicits Hester's admission that Freddie doesn't love her, but gives 'himself' sexually 'from

time to time' a phrase tellingly used of women till then, and subversive in Rattigan's inversion. Hester has been able to accept that occasional gift till now.

Sir William is out of his depth, shown comically reacting to the bad claret Hester warns him about, then crucially in kissing her to implore her return: she responds by stopping herself do more than peck him gently. This Sir William would expect no more, doesn't realise the significance.

Jeremy Crow with Mr Miller's stunning speech as he detects her second attempt at suicide, is passionate with the dead Miller left behind, perhaps too a sexuality that led to his jail term. Crow's towering over this Hester gradates to tenderness, as he briefly holds her. This is one of theatre's great scenes, the finest – certainly deepest – Rattigan ever wrote. Spencer reacts wonderfully, her tear-stained face heliotropic in the small quiet blaze of Crow's recognition of her, the first ever to do so.

There's good work from Ben Pritchard's more avuncular Jackie, clearly less of a pilot and neatly slower-witted here, out of his depth as Freddie tells him. He's nevertheless emotionally more intelligent and sees Hester's plight sympathetically in Freddie's selfish light. Davies makes his very creditable debut as Philip Welch, inhabiting a preachy young home office civil servant who equates his own infatuation the previous year with Hester's tragedy. Somerville McCarthy, so memorable in several roles recently, makes what she can of needy, hidebound Ann, the kind Sir William should have married. Somerville McCarthy's clipped nervousness opens and closes off her small tap of sympathy. Blink and you'd miss it.

Boxall paces this production with the pause and sudden rush Rattigan often elicits. There's no hurry in the last act, that miraculous unfolding of Hester's bleak version of 'I can't go on; I'll go on.' Spencer's subtle anguish carries the arc superbly; with the twist of a half-smile she makes Hester vulnerable, indeed loveable, less heroine, more toweringly human. And happily her consummate Hester is answered here: in the scale of production, in Crow's empathic, passionate plea for life and a host of supporting foils from cast members.

**Simon Jenner**



1. Isabella McCarthy, Somerville, Matthew Davies & Jeremy Crow
2. Emmie Spencer
3. Isabella McCarthy, Somerville & Emmie Spencer
4. Diane Robinson, Emmie Spencer

*Photos by Strat Mastoris*

## A Look Back at **THE DEEP BLUE SEA**

Most of the reviews and analysis of 'The Deep Blue Sea' focus on Hester Collyer's broken marriage and her unhappy relationship with the 'feckless' Freddie Page. The play is understood principally as a love story, and some critics even see it as a *roman à clef* about the suicide of an ex-lover of Terence Rattigan's.

I think that, really, it's about the aftermath of the Second World War, and the unsettling changes to post-war British society. Remember that it's a play from 1952, only seven years after the end of the war, when many of the old pre-war values and certainties were being swept away. As part of this change, Rattigan's elegant drawing-room productions were about to be usurped by the 'kitchen sink' dramas of John Osborne and the 'Angry Young Men' generation. 'Look Back In Anger' opened in 1956, just a few years after 'The Deep Blue Sea', and Osborne's powerful new vision suddenly made Rattigan look old-fashioned and out-of-touch. But it seems to me that - despite superficial differences - both plays are actually about the same thing.

Rattigan's central character is Hester Collyer. Characters' names are often indicative, and 'Hester' is from the Greek - meaning 'Star' or 'Beacon'. She's a beacon of the social and sexual developments that were starting to occur. 'Collyer' is derived from collier. Hester's estranged husband Sir William is a judge, but his ancestors were probably miners - what a social leap his family has made! No wonder he wants to keep the pre-war status quo.

Ironically, Hester has ended up in the same sort of run-down flat that Jimmy Porter inhabits in 'Look Back In Anger'. She's the daughter of a clergyman, while Jimmy's wife Alison is the daughter of a retired Indian Army Colonel, back home after years "commanding the Maharajah's army" before the Partition of India in 1947. Hester and Alison: two upper-class women, who have both broken with their families and ended up living with damaged men.

Damaged. Hester's Freddie is obviously suffering from what would now be called Post-Traumatic Stress. He's been a Spitfire pilot in the war, so has probably killed many men, and seen a lot of good friends killed. Now he's alcoholic, and unable to commit to a steady job or to an emotional relationship. Not uncommon - Freddie's ex RAF pal Jackie Jackson seems pretty damaged, as well.

Jimmy Porter is an intolerable bore and a bully, but he's suffering some form of Post-Traumatic Stress too, like Freddie. Jimmy wasn't old enough to be in the war, but as a youngster he spent a whole year watching his father die of wounds (and probably the effects of torture) sustained as a fighter in the Spanish Civil War. Now Jimmy can't settle for 'normality' and 'peace of mind' - he rails against what he sees as the lack of authenticity, of real feelings, of any discernable change, in post-war Britain - and especially in his wife.

Freddie and Jimmy: two men living with women more upper-class than themselves. Notice how in both cases their names are diminutives - Jimmy, Freddie - like two small children hard to take seriously.

The post-war, post imperial world has been turned upside down. 1956 was the year of the Suez debacle, remember - that harsh lesson about the shrinkage of British power. Alison's parents spent most of their lives in India, serving the Empire, and Alison herself has lived a life of sheltered comfort and privilege. As she says to her father - "You're hurt because everything has changed. Jimmy is hurt because everything is the same. And neither of you can face it". Hester's father and her husband are pillars of the Establishment, but she's desperate to find some authenticity (that word again) - in her own life. She's broken away from her marriage because she has emotional and sexual needs that her husband can't satisfy. The trouble is - her lover Freddie can't satisfy them either, and she's at the end of her tether.

Jimmy went to University - not the kind you 'come down' from at the end of three years, but good enough to give him an education that has widened his intellectual horizons and lifted him out of his class. But he hasn't got the family money or connections to build a satisfying career on the back of his degree, and so he's running a sweet stall in a Midlands town. The huge expansion of post-war education didn't change Jimmy's life prospects - just made him unsatisfied and resentful, and he takes out his anger on his wife.

So we have a pair of plays featuring couples whose lives have reached a dead-end - almost literally, in Hester's case. It needs an external agent to get their lives moving forward. In Rattigan's play it's 'Doctor' Miller. Miller is German - referencing the war again. He might be homosexual, or perhaps it was political, but for whatever reason he left Germany in 1938 and was interned as an alien on the Isle of Man. He's served time in prison, too - remember that being gay was still a criminal offence in the fifties. Like Hester, he's left an intolerable situation and struck out for change, regardless of the cost. He's a survivor - his message to Hester is that she must be a survivor too.

In 'Look Back In Anger' it's Helena. Alison's upper-class actress friend comes to stay in their bedsit and manages to pull Alison away from Jimmy's anti-establishment life and back towards her family and the Church. After the pregnant Alison has left, Helena's happy to bed Jimmy (it seems that opposites attract) and become his surrogate wife. But when the real wife returns, after she's lost their baby, it's Helena who deliberately takes herself out of the equation, leaving the couple to rebuild their relationship after Alison's finally had her real (authentic) experience of suffering.

Two plays that are almost mirror images of each other. They are historical documents, too. Small, intimate domestic dramas giving us a perspective on the tectonic shifts taking place in British society sixty years ago. At the time they were written, John Osborne was considered to have totally eclipsed Terence Rattigan, and the Angry Young Men were in the ascendant throughout the Fifties and Sixties. From a twenty-first century viewpoint, though, it seems to me that Rattigan wrote more realistic, rounded characters, and his themes are more universal and timeless. 'The Deep Blue Sea' seems the better play, and significantly, in recent years it's had a number of revivals - now including ours.

**Strat Mastoris**



## GREGOIRE AUBERT

Local artist Gregoire Aubert has provided the artwork for the May-July NVT brochure. Here we find out more about Gregoire, and offer readers the chance to see the work unobscured by the brochure details.

### Where do you think your creativity comes from?

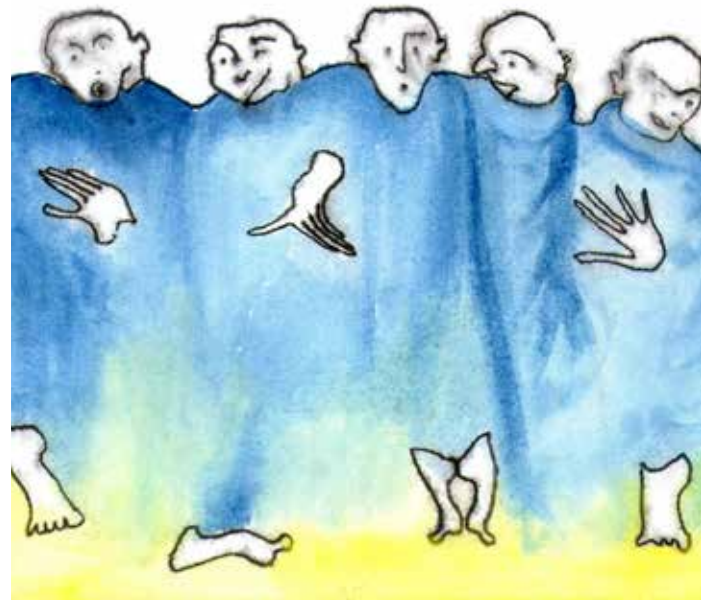
I work with what's given on the paper, I water the surface and I let the faces and the design come through from the shape of the water. When I was a student, I would lie on my bed and look at the ceiling like you would look at the sky and imagine - oh that's a lion or that's a witch - the way that evolves in the sky. And I had all those figures and I said well, I'm going to draw them. And it's mostly those very skinny older men that I'm drawing, I saw faces and people and I draw them.

### How do you work?

I work in series most of the time. I go to my desk and I draw and I draw and I can do fifty drawings in one afternoon. I just have a mental idea of what I want to do and then I use that process; I use loads of water, and the stain from the table usually dictates what I'm going to draw. There there's paint on the table and I add water so it's going to print on the paper and gives me the figure that I'm going to draw, just like the ceiling. It's like people coming round to see me, it's just like when you watch the clouds and say, oh there's a bunny.

### How has your practice changed over time?

It changes because I'm becoming more aware of what I'm doing. You get bored quite easily because you're always in your own frame, so it's trying to find surprise. I read a lot and I try to remember techniques. For example lately I have done some blind drawings, which means I draw with my eyes closed just to surprise myself with the result. When you draw you try to connect with being a child because that's when you are so creative and not judgmental about your work, and when you draw and close your eyes there's always an element of chance. I like to do things that are challenging like painting with watercolour on a canvas for example, when the canvas is reluctant to watercolour - it soaks it up very quickly.



### What are you working on currently that excites you?

I've been doing quite small-scale drawings so I'm trying to expand it on larger scales. What I draw is basically theatre figures or 'cartoonish', so I still want to keep it quite simple as I'm more of a drawer than a painter. I love colour but I couldn't just splash colours on a canvas and be happy with it. It needs to have a frame and the frame is always the lines.

### What art do you most identify with?

My favourite artist is Paul Klee. I've always loved the art from the 20th Century, especially the avant-gardes from the first 30 years. My favourite artists are those who try to mix abstract with figuration, I need people in my paintings. And I also love medieval paintings - that kind of naive feel. We all have the same traits as a human and you can capture that in a very few lines. There's an American artist I love, Hirschfeld, who used to do all the Broadway drawings for Playbill. It's just that minimal use of signs - for Judy Garland he would just do a nose like that, another arch, two eyes and very small lips and you would see her. He would capture the essence of a character in one line and that's exactly what I'm trying to do.

# NVT ACTING CLASSES

**Mondays 7:30 - 9:30 PM**

Please arrive in good time to begin promptly at 7:30 PM

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In these drop in sessions you will be working with various teachers and cover acting techniques as well as theatre skills. We will be looking at audition techniques, working with text, movement, comedy and stage presence amongst other themes. The classes are mixed levels and open to anyone 18+, no previous experience needed. Attending the acting class is the best way to get involved with what we do and find out about auditions and productions. We encourage all our members as well as those who want to get involved in the theatre in anyway to come along.

To find out more, come along to a class or to request more information about a particular block of sessions, have a look at our website at [www.newventure.org.uk](http://www.newventure.org.uk), where you can sign up to our mailing list, or email: [actingclass@newventure.org.uk](mailto:actingclass@newventure.org.uk).

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• Ticket prices: £9 (£8 members) Final Fri/Sat £10 (£9 members) First Fri/Tue £8 (£7 members) • Evening performances 7:45pm  
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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
<b>A double bill: 'Hughie' by Eugene O'Neill &amp; 'The Real Inspector Hound' by Tom Stoppard</b> 21-29 April Studio				
<b>'Lulu' by Frank Wedekind</b> 19-27 May *Theatre Upstairs				
<b>'Proof' by David Auburn</b> 16-24 June Studio				

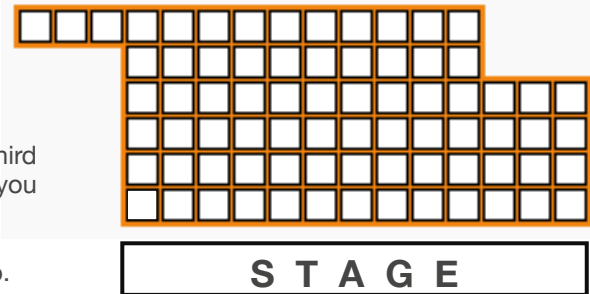
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