

NEW VENTURE

T H E A T R E

COMING SOON | TRUE WEST by Sam Shepard | Directed by Steven O'Shea | 19–27 January

THE MESSIAH

by Patrick Barlow | with additional material by John Ramm, Jude Kelly and Julian Hough
directed by Rod Lewis | 7–16 December

Desmond Olivier Dingle introduces himself as the Artistic Director and Chief Executive of the National Theatre of Brent, as well as being the Author, Designer and Director of his production of *The Messiah* – he's really sort of 'auteur' actually . . . and Master Thespian! Anyway, the fortunate public, are about to witness his Grand Vision! Namely, the enactment of the entire Christmas story – with Joseph, Mary, the Archangel Gabriel, Herod, God and many, many others – all to be played by his sublimely talented self and his company of one, his not so talented sidekick, the helpful (but not always) and willing (but not always) Raymond. All to be accompanied by spasmodic bursts of Handel's *Messiah* by the rather uncontrollable and wayward guest star, Mrs Flowers – Opera Singer. The result is an inspired satire that sends up theatre's epic pretensions and yet can still evoke the momentous.

Although the show both sends up modern theatre and offers a very funny study of an archetypal bully-and-stooge relationship – the handling of the essential story is respectful, and never at any stage blasphemous – there's almost an element of tender innocence running through it as the relationship between Desmond and Raymond evolves.

The National Theatre of Brent was conceived and created in 1979 and has become something of a legend in



Photo by Ulrike Schilling

I was lucky enough in the 80s to see *The Messiah* at the Tricycle Theatre – as well as some of their other productions – and luckier still to be able to persuade Grips Theater Berlin, where I had been working around that time, to let me direct the first German language production of the play – it proved to be a great success. When considering what might be a fun Christmas production for us at NVT – a play that would be a pleasure for everyone involved to do and for our audiences to see – Patrick Barlow's *The Messiah* immediately sprang to mind. And what a pleasure it has been to work with such a hugely talented cast with Robert Purchase playing Desmond Olivier Dingle and Culann Smyth as Raymond, and Cirū James, in fine voice, as Mrs Flowers – all backed up by a great design and backstage team.

"The comedy is two-pronged. It is about pretension and about incompetence. Both prongs are bliss." *Financial Times*.

British Theatre for its two-man epic re-enactments of myth and history. These include *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, *Zulu!*, *The Black Hole of Calcutta*, *Wagner's Ring Cycle*, *Massive Landmarks of the Twentieth Century* and *The French Revolution* to name just a few. Patrick Barlow, as well as being an extremely witty writer – witness his recent version of Buchan's *The Thirty Nine Steps* – has numerous acting credits too.

"Ridiculously funny yet gloriously exhilarating" wrote the *Guardian* about the National Theatre of Brent's *Messiah* in 1983 – and it still is.

If you fancy *The Messiah* for some laughter for the run in to this Christmas – I advise you to book early!

Rod Lewis

NVT Social

FULL BEAM

by David Smilow | adapted by Barry Purchase | directed by Mike Stubbs
1 December | free entry | 7pm–midnight

This short play will be performed in the NVT's Theatre Upstairs during our Social Evening on Friday, 1st December.

This will be the UK premiere and we are most grateful for David Smilow's support for this project.

The action is set in a moving car, with two couples off for the weekend. The tensions between them are complicated by the behaviour of the car that's following them . . .

Mike Stubbs directs, with script adaptation by Barry Purchase; lighting and sound by Strat Mastoris and Jazz Bowden; voice coaching from Chris Stubbs.

The actors (all from NVT Acting Classes) are:

Fred	Adam Kincaid
Karen, his wife	Deborah Slot
Richard	Andy Grant
Vera, his girlfriend	Kasha Goodenough

The performance will start at 9pm, with free entry. Do come along!

Mike Stubbs

NVT Social

CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

22 December | free entry | 7pm–midnight

No performances this time – just a simple evening where people can come and celebrate the holiday season with their pals over a few drinks and cheer!

Drop in anytime from 7pm until midnight.

Proposals to direct for the 2018/19 season now open

Please see the website for details or email
art.dir@newventure.org.uk

CASTINGS

True West by Sam Shepard directed by Steven O'Shea

Austin	James Macauley
Lee	Stuart Lee
Saul	Martin Ryan
Mom	Janice Jones

Our Lady of Sligo by Sebastian Barry directed by Mark Wilson

Mai	Lyn Snowdon
Jack	Bill Arundel
Joanie	Julie Monkcom
Dada	Michael Bulman
Maria	Josephine Dimpleby
Sister	Helen O'Brien

ANNA CHRISTIE

directed by Jerry Lyne | review Simon Jenner

New Venture Theatre has form when it comes to American drama, and Eugene O'Neill's one comedy *Hughie* featured in its last season. O'Neill's 1921 *Anna Christie* earned him his second Pulitzer, and it's different to many of his other plays in exploring redemption, new beginnings grounded in honesty. As long as you go through an O'Neill kind of hell first.

Barry Purchese's slightly edited version of *Anna Christie* rightly pares some extraneous characters (often added to give employment); there's now five. In fact apart from the first scene, it's even clearer that *Anna Christie* is essentially a three-hander. This production underlines that in Jerry Lyne's atmospheric but superbly lucid production.

Not only are some extraneous extras at the start shaved, the delivery of different accents is given weight and measure; it's helped by Purchese's decision to pare down some of the clunky 'by Jiminys' too. There's more than enough left. Everything, no matter the density of accent, is utterly clear – which helps make the climactic third act so electrifying.

Adam Kinkaid's flexible Upstairs set locates an upstage centre door as Martin Ryan's Johnny the Priest, like most bartenders shabbily clean, whittles down a tenebrous life in a bottle-refracted bar. Sparse chairs and tables discover Lyn



Photo by Strat Mastoris

Snowdon's Marthy, a raucous demi-mondaine, as much as you can use French on New York's waterfront. Act 2 dissolves to a barge deck with an artfully poised skylight with lights downstage centre and ropes with attendant use of smoke as fog. The last two acts relocate under the barge's hatches in a cabin, with bleak comforts only slightly warmer than the bar. Phil Palmer's lighting and Seb

Warrington's rig suffuse a grainy whoosh of light shuttered and squeezed through doors and sometimes fog-lights operated by Alex Epps. It's a seamless concept, absorbing the stage management team's skills (Gaby Bowring, Bryony Weaver, Michelle Harris and Amanda Harman) as well as Lyne's and assistant director and production manager Ulrike Schilling. Ian Black's sound wafts in shore noises, and superbly in sea and fog in the atmospherics of Act 2. The music's unexpected: Vaughan William's *Tallis Fantasia*, written the year this is set: 1910; as well as Dvorak's *New World Symphony Largo* and a French cello improv, like Matthew Barley's, an evocative, inspired choice.

Anna Christie (Isabella McCarthy Sommerville), a young woman whom her father Chris Christopherson (Mark Lester) is waiting for, at Johnny the Priest's bar, where he tells the gnarly warm Marthy she might need to move out. She's used to this, no hard feelings. Lester conveys Christopherson's thick Swedish accent (O'Neill's text makes you trip over every damned glottal) and thicker hopelessness. 'Old devil sea' takes his drive, the way sailors spend and are robbed, returning straight to sea. It's his

Photo by Tamsin Mastoris





Photo by Strat Mastoris

far better psychologically here than in some of his plays. Cleanness is a desperate plea.

Anna's independent enough to laugh off her new-found father's over-protectiveness. Certainly she's not in need of protection from a sailor, Mat Burke, Chris Gates' lanky Irish stoker rescued as the last survivor of a ship crashing into them with his lifeboat. Fresh dynamics flood the stage as McCarthy Somerville spars and edges closer to Gates' hulking vulnerability. Lester's heavy father antics should be telling, and Lester vividly conveys his new-found but shrunken authority in being unable to direct a daughter's welfare. We see Christopherson's powers slowly leaking away, cajoled by both his daughter and the man he's giving hospitality to. Lester's consummate in conveying his waning bluster.

It's the third act set ten days later that explodes. Christopherson's still trying to dissuade Anna: he's lost. She declares she's not good enough to marry Burke in any case. It's the smart-talking swaggering Burke who's suddenly discomfited. O'Neill builds up the two men's conflict with each other and wildly inaccurate assumptions of who Anna Christie is. Finally she explodes and tells them of her rape by the youngest of her cousins – Marthy had heard this, and of her trying to be a governess for two years. And then a life in 'one of those houses'. It's perhaps the most thrilling moment I can remember in an NVT performance. At this moment, and elsewhere, it's a production that would attract praise on a professional London stage.

The crushed Christopherson reacts one way, Burke wholly another. Only an actor as powerful as McCarthy Somerville can convince us of such double standards alluded to by Anna's character as she declares she's changed, she never loved but hated those men who used her. It's one of her recurring outbursts, the hatefulness of men. Now she rounds on the only two she's cared for. It's a magnificent moment; you wish she'd follow through, shake Burke off her feet.

Gates, swaggeringly then dangerously turned, matches his partner here – indeed he's consistently strong; quixotically adoring, viciously hypocritical, damaged by church and the bankrupt state of men's assumptions. Gates' quivering rage enacts the way he's 'destroyed' as his Irish expression claims, in this case a crumbling tower, crushed under his

refrain: all's explained, even excused by his knowing collapse from responsibility – like bringing up a motherless child.

His Swedish wife dying, Christopherson sent Anna to farming relatives in Minnesota but never visited in fifteen years. A twenty-year-old nurse, she's asked to come east. He misses her, leaving briefly, but Marthy recognizes her own as Isabella McCarthy Somerville (Anna) lights in, weary and famished from travel. Her concentrated presence is strong enough for her to turn it down, sheathing her fire in raw Midwest twang: not quite Hick, not big city. In contrast to Lester (Christopherson), she speaks rapidly, more fluent, more raspingly used to barter and defence. It's closer to Marthy's raw tones.

When Christopherson returns, he finds he barely recognizes the cigarette-smoking hard-drinking adult who's roughed it in every way. Only Marthy guesses how much. She's simplified her patronymic

to the Christie of the title. The slow-circling tenderness around Snowdon and McCarthy Somerville from snappiness to warmth is summed up as the latter identifies Snowdon as 'me in forty years'. Snowdon's raucously convincing Marthy is as finely judged in a saw of noise as Ryan's flat-toned reticence occasionally rivets us to his stillness, his listening and saying nothing. Snowdon and Ryan are seen no more as father and daughter edgily reunite. Anna almost flees.

We next see them as ten days later they reminisce on a fog-swirled deck, snaked with rope coils. McCarthy Somerville memorably gives expression as she does throughout to the sea's cleanness, how she'd bathe and become reborn. It's the mirror reverse of *Old Devil Sea*: like her father with that phrase, the daughter returns to hers. Such an ablative trope – Catholic imagery – might seem strange in Lutheran Swedes, though O'Neill and the next protagonist are steeped in Catholicism. O'Neill's symbolism works

cultural baggage. Certainly mutterings in the audience underline our own outrage.

But McCarthy Somerville has to perform Anna's own slow crumbling: she can't bear Burke's violent disgust. In an act so scrapingly agonised, you both feel for Anna and still feel with her desperate love. Tracing a fiery arc, McCarthy Somerville carries her ferocity to extinction.

How this somehow plays out, in the last act two days later, is spellbinding. If you think you know O'Neill, be prepared for surprises. This is a superb production nearly pitch-perfect in every respect, directed with air around it but a strong lean focus on the sea-girt triangle shaping all the protagonists' lives. Gates, Lester and above all the mesmerising McCarthy Somerville render this as satisfying as any production could.



Simon Jenner

Photo by Strat Mastoris

Reprinted from The Fringe Review
<http://fringereview.co.uk/review/fringereview-uk/2017/anna-christie/>

BREAKFAST CLUB

First Saturday of each month

Breakfast Club opened its door for the first time on Saturday 11th November, and a lovely time was had by all who came. The thinking behind the club is that we often have people who express an interest in getting involved with NVT, but who don't have the time to commit to working on a full production. Breakfast Club offers an opportunity for new and old members to socialise whilst getting some jobs done – an easy way to be involved with and contribute to the theatre. For our first session, we turned our hands to the crafty task of making merchandise for *The Messiah*, our Christmas production. By the end of the session, we had drunk quite a lot of tea, eaten a fair few croissants and produced a flock of sheep. Not bad for a morning's work! Everyone said that they had a lovely time – that is was relaxing and fun. A big thank you to Richard, Sam, Cirū, Jackie, Erica and Hermione for all your efforts! Really very much appreciated.

Plans are afoot for the next session – if you'd like to be kept in the loop, email me – volunteering@newventure.org.uk – and I'll make sure that I get in touch with all the details. It will also be on our Facebook page and I'll put a note up on the new notice board in the kitchen. I hope to see you there!

Melissa Noble



Jackie Jones, Richard de Costobadie, Cirū James, Sam de Costobadie, Melissa Noble, Hermione Huxley and Erica Fletcher.

Photo by George Walters

NVT VACANT ROLES

Since the AGM we have had additions to our role holders. It is with great thanks to Peter Meekings, who returns to the theatre after a number of years away, who has taken on the role of Buildings Manager and to Christine Stubbs who has stepped into the role of Box Office Coordinator.

This still leaves us with a few roles to be filled. If you are suddenly driven or have always held a desire to take on a role, maybe one of those listed below will pique your interest. If so please contact one of the committee or email – info@newventure.org.uk

NVT Roles still vacant:

Marketing & Publicity Coordinator

The Marketing and Publicity coordinator is in charge of spreading the news about our Productions. They will work alongside Directors and Production Managers to generate interest and excitement about upcoming plays. They will write press releases, use social media and liaise with local radio and tv. This is an exciting opportunity to gain valuable experience to use your literary talents in a creative environment.

Much of the work can be done from home but there is office space within the theatre if you prefer to work on site. You would need to be available to meet with the Director/Production Manager and attend production meetings, and often this would be in the evening/at weekends.

OUR ANGELS

Why not become an Angel, Fallen Angel, Archangel or even Archangel Gabriel to help us support the current and future improvements to our theatre? Our Angels have proven to be generous in their assistance.

For further information please contact the Angels Coordinator Gerry McCrudden: angels@newventure.org.uk

If you are a UK tax payer your donation will also benefit from Gift Aid.

Props Manager

The Props Manager oversees and maintains the NVT Props store, provides advice and props to each production, as required. Identifies when items are beyond use as well as taking in new items that become available and maintains an up to date list / database of all NVT props.

Health & Safety Manager

Our Health and Safety Manager oversees all aspects of Health and Safety within the theatre. They will look at activities within productions, help identify risks and work with the Production team to come up with creative ways around any problems. This role will require someone with Health & Safety experience. It would be useful to have an understanding of manual handling and risk assessment. This is a brilliant opportunity to share your experience of safe working practice within a creative environment.

Fundraising Manager

The Fundraising Manager provides the link to outside organisations who provide grants, bursaries etc. This enables the theatre to look at the larger projects for development and upgrading to keep our physical and creative environments to the highest standard possible. A knowledge of fundraising applications processes would be helpful.

NVT ACTING CLASSES

Mondays 7:30 - 9:30 PM

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

COST: £5 (NVT members £2.50)

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, where you can sign up to our mailing list, or email: actingclass@newventure.org.uk.

NVT TICKET BOOKING INFORMATION

book online at 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 • Final Saturday Matinee 2:30pm and evening show • No performances on Mondays •
Please note: access to the Theatre Upstairs is only possible by 4 flights of stairs, and may not be suitable for those with mobility difficulties.

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
<i>The Messiah by Patrick Barlow</i> 7-16 December <i>Studio</i>				
<i>True West by Sam Shepard</i> 19-27 January <i>*Theatre Upstairs</i>				
<i>Our Lady of Sligo by Sebastian Barry</i> 16-24 February <i>Studio</i>				

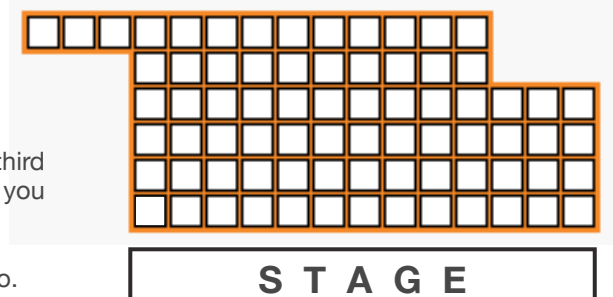
It is important you provide your name, phone number and address, and email address where possible

*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.



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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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