

NEW VENTURE

T H E A T R E

**COMING SOON | 1984 by George Orwell | Adapted by Matthew Dunster
| Directed by Nick Richards | 11-19 May**

**BAD JEWS by Joshua Harmon | Directed by Bob Ryder | 16-24 March
7.45pm | Matinee on Sunday 18th 2.30 pm | No performance on
Monday 19th**

It's been more than 20 years since I directed a show at NVT and it's great to see close-up just how much has happened and developed over that time. And I can also see one sure thing that's remained constant - the commitment to create a quality theatre experience for members and public alike.

Well ... a title like "Bad Jews" certainly grabs the attention. London Underground rose clumsily to the bait when they refused to allow posters for the original UK production, fearing "widespread serious offence". They ended up looking rather silly when it was pointed out that the play had been (a) performed across the world to great acclaim for the last two years, (b) consistently praised for its integrity, and (c) awarded a 5-star review by the Jewish Chronicle.

The title is just a trick of words, to catch our interest and curiosity. The billboards for the original production also called it "a seriously smart comedy about family, faith, and legacy" - less eye-catching but a very fair description. The play does indeed pose lots of questions about competing claims for what makes a 'good' or 'bad' member of any family, any religion or belief, any cultural background. But the great delight of this play is that it presents its questions so generously wrapped - in a massive helping of humour and daring comedy.

The action unfolds in 100 minutes "real time" (whoops, sorry, no interval!) in a studio apartment in Manhattan, where our four young people are thrown together for the night, after the funeral of a beloved grandfather. All sorts of tensions and disagreements burst out, but the big battle is about which of the four most deserves to inherit a tiny item of the old man's jewellery - so tiny, but packing a huge significance for the family.

I love this play because it does the kind of things that only theatre can. We get extreme arguments, insults, embarrassments, swears, tempers and emotional meltdowns. We also get great flashes of humanity, insight and sympathy. But along with all that we get an almost unlimited licence to laugh - with the characters, and at the



Emmie Spencer, Chris Knight and Matt Davies



Sarah Drew

characters, and at all the situations they let themselves fall into. Like many of the finest plays, it works as a satisfying "whole" - we get to think about some really serious stuff while we're having enormous fun and engagement with the characters, the humour and the action.

It's a work that struck me immediately as energetic, ambitious and young at heart. What better qualities to inspire the people involved in making a show, and to captivate the people who come to see it!

Bob Ryder, Director | Photos: Strat Mastoris, Bob Ryder

OUR LADY OF SLIGO by Sebastian Barry | Directed by Mark Wilson | Review by Dr Simon Jenner

Some plays aren't often revived for a reason. Sebastian Barry's *Our Lady of Sligo* was acclaimed on its National Theatre/Out of Joint premiere in April 1998, and again on Broadway where Sinead Cusack reprised the central role of Mai as late as 2011.

It's a supremely poetic if maddeningly tricky play to bring off. There's references to Mai's eyebrows pencilled in like a sketch, or the way lipstick cuts into a mouth like stone. Think Brian Friel, particularly his 1991 masterpiece *Dancing at Lughnasa* – which NVT triumphantly mounted in February 2010. *Our Lady's* also an acutely autobiographical piece, as in much Barry. Here the central character though narrational isn't the omniscient one in Friel. But the a-chronological dance of memories moves in Barry with the ghostly yearning of the earlier play, if far less sequentially. In Barry too, there's less interaction, more individual scenes and arias. Who but NVT would mount this?

Mark Wilson's production owns a fluidity maximised in the Studio space, set in the round. He makes some excellent decisions with the minimal props managed by Trisha Bayliss, the nearest thing to a set. Wilson establishes diagonals: at one corner, a chair's sheeted and pillowed. It's where Lyn Snowden's hospitalised dying Mai nests. At the end of that diagonal there's the chair some characters inhabit, albeit briefly. Directly opposite the nurse's desk with a chair and a few notes suggests the hospital chair radiates to present and past. You wonder why it's not a bed. The nurse makes a few notes and you wish there was a little more of this action. In the second act there's some welcome interaction by Snowden with the audience. Again, even more would be welcome.

Characters interact in memory and fact, sometimes both together. Strat Mastoris' lighting works an enviable slant to the past, and Adam Hewitt's sound is neatly evocative if a touch overwhelming, in the way sound design often is – even at the National or Royal Court. The music's well chosen though just once in the jazz you feel Snowden's competing to be heard. Maisie Wilkins manages some suggestive costumes, particularly Mai's dress, perfect for 1953 when this play's set. Mai too is fifty-three. The original was Barry's maternal grandmother, stunningly brilliant student at Galway University with her life before her.



It's Snowden's play, and she's the tour-de-force in it, a prodigious feat of never being off-stage and virtually never being out of a scene. If she is, she's meant to be asleep, and Snowden's repose seems to breed monsters. As indeed they certainly do, if more benign than the live ones.

Snowden's energy is infectious, skirling with laughter or raucous to the winds, elemental in passions and apologizing to the nurse for 'shitting on the floor' as she wrestles with how to die painlessly from liver cancer brought on by alcoholism. There's a heart-warming vehemence and rage at the dying of the light, a poem written a year earlier by a poet dying in the year this play is set, 1953.

The only thing Snowden hasn't settled into – and she probably will by the end of the run – is shade. There needs to be a little more repose, a quietness. Some of the writing lends itself to it. But make no mistake, Snowden has here shown herself capable of owning an entire stage and we should be seeing more of her.

Snowden interacts most tenderly with the excellent Nursing Sister played by Helen O'Brien who worked professionally as one and with Irish nurses, after an initial acting career. O'Brien brings an understated sympathy, a positioning and stillness that's quietly mesmerising. There's tenderness in her refusal to judge Mai, her laughter at Mai's valedictory dictum 'Fuck it!' Sister has heard far worse.

Barry here touches as one of those Irish women who buck the trend of Catholic judgment. Growing up in Dublin in the late 1950s to 1960s, this writer can attest to them: they're rarely celebrated in the recent battle



cry over abuse. They were the ones who fought it. You wish there was even more for O'Brien to do. She's quietly sovereign in this role.

Michael Bulman's Dada too evokes Snowden's most heartfelt reactions. Bulman himself is a singer and it shows: his vocal ability's commanding and wondrously musical, just as a commanding Irish elder's is meant to be. Again, Barry has rather isolated his interactions to Mai alone, since he lives in her past. Nevertheless he owns a superbly burnished presence as well as tone.

Julia Monkom's Abbey Theatre actress Joanie is another small marvel. As Mai's slightly estranged daughter she's able to interact with at least three characters but – Barry's fault again – has frustratingly little to do. This is a pity. Monkom's shift from physical theatre is telling. She's still to the point of aching, where necessary. Her painful rows with Mai and her father Jack reveal layers of betrayal, misprision and disgust it'd be so rewarding to bring out. Monkom you feel might be able to convey this in a slightly lengthier performance, and you feel too the cracking pace is set partly to overcome perceived lacunae and flaws in the structure. Perhaps it'd be good to let them gape. But this can't be known till another production attempts it, and this reviewer hasn't seen another.

One curious decision pays dividends. Josephine Dimbleby's Maria is meant to be about sixty-five when Mai's thirty-five. Mai's alcoholism following the death of her son, her younger child, has just become incipient. Maria connects to Mai's past. Dimbleby's in fact far younger, and technically this part should have gone to an older actor – they're invisible enough. Nevertheless Dimbleby's empathy for Mai, stillness and haunting absolution is again one of the most transfixing moments of the play. As is her continual evocation of a shared past, partly as remonstrance, partly as benediction. Barry's again underused this character – there are only

six – and particularly with Dimbleby as with Monkom and O'Brien – you feel this is a loss.

Bill Arundel's Jack is allowed more elbow, and indeed he takes it twirling to face all the audience as Snowden does. In Arundel's case it's dizzyingly so. His accent's dangerously light but Jack was a British army major in bomb disposal and admiring of the old Protestant Ascendancy and Arundel settles into a convincing skirl of disappointment. Jack's tragedy is that when he becomes briefly the gentleman he knows they'd respect, they've dissolved in death exile or indifference. Arundel has the right bustle and energy, the alcoholic who drags his wife there – enduring the contempt of Dada – with his film-star looks in youth, once a British Merchant Marine officer and clearly intelligent and well-informed. These are hooks to Mai and succeed.

But he loses Mai's house, carefully left by Dada, and they sink. Arundel well evokes Jack's pain and at the key moments at the end of each act enacts and reacts to his statement that Mai's responsible for the death of their son. The worst of it though, is Mai believes him. At that point she states, she begins her premature march to death. Arundel makes one on occasion feel like a spinning top as he continually takes in everyone in the round, something that Snowden does. You long for him to take up the under-used chair a bit more and tell the story from there. The trouble with props lite is that actors have less to anchor them, and can on occasion drag out to sea. Arundel though has the right vitality, Jack's burl and bustle and something of his inner despair. No-one's villainous here; it's about loss and forgiveness.

These plot punctuations are the nearest to conventional structure and release this play comes to. It's infinitely affecting, almost Chekhovian, and one of the reasons to see this excellent cast. The fact that sadly you'll not see another Barry play in these parts unless you pick up one of his Booker-shortlisted novels is one good reason: it's superbly adventurous NVT planning. The fact that there's some magnificent acting though makes it a must-see, for the soul as well as theatre-goer.

Review by Simon Jenner | Photos by Strat Mastoris | Also published on www.fringereview.co.uk

OUR LADY OF SLIGO by Sebastian Barry | Directed by Mark Wilson | Review by Brighton Moon

New Venture Theatre strips down its stage to bring audiences to the hospital deathbed of Mai O'Hara, whose flickering moments of fading life recount the pivotal points that shaped her tragic tale. Formerly renowned as 'the Belle of Galway', Mai was once a brightly shining flame of talented youth; however, a tempestuous marriage, the death of a child and stagnation of life in de Valera's Ireland, drives her down the dark spiral of alcoholism to her demise.

Leading lady, Lyn Snowdon, displays the astounding strength and talent which is needed to bring this multi-faceted piece to life. Her effective transformations between young and old, weak and strong, lucid and muddled, smoothly move the audience between life events, deathbed interactions and the thoughts of a morphine clouded mind. Displaying regret, guilt, strength and humour through a clear and consistent Irish accent is a tall challenge, which Snowdon skilfully surmounts once she has found her stride.



Nervous energy hastens the delivery of lines in earlier scenes and serves to adversely soften the impact of potentially powerful words; however, as the play progresses, cast members interact beautifully to set a tempo which evokes strong thoughts and emotions. There was not a hair out of place in this ensemble, comprising of the guilt ridden husband, the emotionally scarred daughter, the concerned aunt and the compassionate nurse. This is not to neglect Michael Bulman's performance, which is particularly worthy of mention, as he notably delivers his lines with such measured poise that he is every bit the wise and watchful father.

From observing the cast's movement and use of space, it is evident that highly experienced direction produced this piece. With dialogues being uttered diagonally across the length of the stage, intimate bedside moments are opened up and the manifestation of Mai's thoughts are wonderfully displayed.

The New Venture Theatre invests soul in every element of each production it stages, this is no exception.

Review also published on <http://theatremoonreview.blogspot.co.uk>

ARTS COUNCIL NEWS by Gerry McCrudden

Congratulations to the Arts Society of East Sussex

As well as our own upcoming Platinum celebrations it is a pleasure to extend to The Arts Society of East Sussex (formerly known as Nadfas) our congratulations on their Jubilee.

To mark the anniversary they are organising a special 'Arts and Antiques in Hove' event at the Hove Club on 2nd May. This will include presentations by prominent cultural societies who will talk about their activities and describe ways in which to get involved. As well as the New Venture Theatre there will be presentations by the Brighton & Hove Philharmonic Orchestra, the Brighton & Hove Arts Council as well the Cameron Art Gallery and Hove Plinth. Experts from Gorrings Auction Galleries in Lewes will be on hand to evaluate any personal items brought along.

This will be a ticketed event and if you are interested please contact Mrs Jane Hopkin direct on 01273 649967.

AUDITION NOTICE - ELEPHANT'S GRAVEYARD

Elephant's Graveyard by George Brant

Directed by David Eaton

Audition date 7th of March, 7pm
Call backs Sunday 11th, 2pm
Production dates 1st and 2nd of June, evenings.

There was a town. There was a circus. There was a railroad. There was an elephant. And there was a man with red hair. In 1916, a tiny town in Tennessee will experience the greatest show on Earth. A sight never before seen by any man and it's going to put them on the map, forever. Combining historical fact and legend, this poignant and revealing play sheds a harsh spotlight on mankind's lust for spectacle, violence and revenge. The performance will be a rehearsed reading running over two nights.

Ringmaster (M) 30+ Obsessed with the bottom line
Trainer (M/F) 20 – 40 loves the work
Ballet Girl (F) 20+ A showgirl in control
Tour Manager (M) 30+ Bit of a bully
Strongman (M) 30 – 50 A proud muscleman from Europe's far-off shores
Clown (M) 30+ A comedian with an inferiority complex
Hungry Townsperson (M) 30+ African-American, a steel trap memory
Marshall (M) 40+ Keeps the peace
Muddy Townsperson (F) 40+ A haunted widow
Preacher (M) 20 – 40 Doggedly hopeful
Steam Shovel Operator (M) 30+ Looking for an escape
Young Townsperson (M/F) 16-20 Excitable dreamer
Engineer (M) 30+ Confident time is on his side

Also we are looking for anyone who can play the guitar/harmonica and a drummer.

The audition will be a group workshop focusing on characterisation, you will not need to prepare an audition piece. However be prepared to talk about yourself, work collaboratively and come up with your own ideas and show off any talents you have to offer. If you would like me to email a sample of the script please email me: davidmteaton@hotmail.co.uk

We are also looking to fill several backstage roles, so please get in touch if you'd like to be involved.

AUDITION NOTICE - LOVESONG

AUDITION NOTICE

'Lovesong'

By Abi Morgan

Directed by Kirsty Elmer

Production dates: 20th – 28th July 2018

Audition dates: Saturday 24th March 1-5pm/

Tuesday 27th March 7:30-9:30pm in the South Hall

Recalls: Saturday 7th April 12-3 pm in the Main Theatre

'Lovesong' is the story of one couple, told from two different points in their lives – as young lovers in their 20s and as worldly companions looking back on their relationship. Their past and present selves collide in this haunting and beautiful tale of togetherness. All relationships have their ups and downs; the optimism of youth becomes the wisdom of experience. Love is a leap of faith. It's about falling in love and the endurance of relationships.

This is a very moving play about life and love. It was originally staged by Frantic Assembly in

association with the Drum Theatre in Plymouth and Chichester Festival Theatre in 2011. Written by Abi Morgan, who is an award-winning writer for stage and screen, probably most known for her TV series, 'The Hour'.

I want to work with actors and designers to create a moving piece of theatre, with sound, lighting and multimedia elements very much integral to the creative process to help make connections through time. The play affords the actors an unusual and enviable opportunity to work together on their character understanding and development through time. The writing is beautiful; but never overly-sentimental. I would expect those who wish to audition to have read the play or have a familiar knowledge of the play's content.

The parts are the same couple shown at different parts of their lives:

Margaret – 20/30s

William – 20/30s

Maggie- 60/70s

Billy – 60/70s

If you would like to receive copies of the audition pieces by email, please contact me at kirstyharbron@yahoo.co.uk. You do not need to have learnt these, but being familiar with them would be an advantage. The recall workshop audition will not require any advance preparation.

To book an audition slot, or if you require any further information, please email kirstyharbron@yahoo.co.uk (Director) and ulrike.schilling@newventure.org.uk (Production Manager).

Please bring your diary/dates of unavailability to the audition.

We are also keen to hear from you if you would like to be part of the design and technical team. Offers of roles are conditional on applicants being paid-up members of the NVT for the duration of the entire rehearsal and performance period.



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FRIDAY 13th APRIL

Submissions (< 200 words) to
beth@differentdevelopment.com by 9th March

NVT ACTING CLASS

Mondays 7:30 - 9:30pm

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

Cost: £5 (NVT members £2.50)

In these drop in sessions you will be working with various teachers and cover acting 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 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 - www.newventure.org.uk where you can sign up to our mailing list, or email actingclass@newventure.org.uk

OUR ANGELS

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

For further information please contact the Angel Coordinator Gerry McCrudden: angels@newventure.org.uk. If you are a UK tax payer your donation may also benefit from Gift Aid.

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 ~ 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.

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
'Bad Jews' by Joshua Harmon 16-24 <i>March Theatre Upstairs</i>				
'1984' by George Orwell, Adapted by Matthew Dunster 11-19 May <i>Theatre Upstairs</i>				
'Elephant's Graveyard' by George Brant 1-9 June <i>Studio</i>				

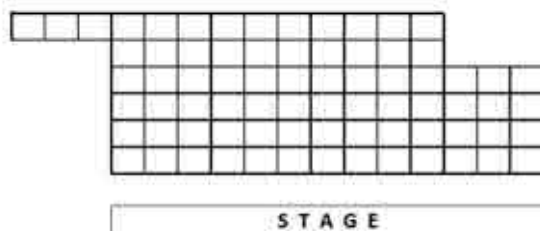
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Theatre Upstairs Allocated Seating

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

Please mark your preferred seat(s) with 1s and a second and third option with 2s and 3s, 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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Please write in with any comments, articles or reviews of our productions and events to the Newsletter Editor - newsletter@newventure.org.uk or by post to the New Venture Theatre.

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