

NEW VENTURE

T H E A T R E

COMING SOON | THE MESSIAH by Patrick Barlow | Directed by Rod Lewis | 07-16 December

ANNA CHRISTIE

by Eugene O'Neill | adapted by Barry Purchase | directed by Jerry Lyne | 10-18 November



Following Dan Walker's great success with 'Hughie' in March, we are delighted to stage Eugene O'Neill's Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Anna Christie*.

A prolific writer and often considered the father of modern American drama, O'Neill was quintessentially an autobiographical playwright. The sea, bars and alcohol all played a large part in his life and work. He spent some of his early years at sea, proud of the fact that he qualified as an Able Seaman. An unsettled childhood, his mother becoming an addict after taking morphine during his birth, a brother's death and the constant absence of his actor father greatly affected his life and work.

Like a lot of his earlier works, *Anna*

Christie focuses on the effect the sea and alcohol has on his characters, and typically, the play opens in a waterfront bar. Johnny the Priest's is based on the downtown bar and flop house Jimmy the Priest's, where O'Neill spent time in an alcoholic haze in 1911 whilst arranging the divorce from his first wife. A constant theme is the inevitability of the power of the sea; whatever we do, it wins. It offers freedom, but at a price. It allows our characters to blame their failings on 'that ol' devil sea', as Chris Christopherson repeatedly does, but it offers Anna a new start. While staring into the night fog, she says, 'I feel clean, somehow, as if I had taken a bath'.

As a child, Anna is sent by her Swedish seafaring father Chris to live with cousins

in Minnesota, where she is badly abused. Drifting into prostitution, she escapes and writes to her father, telling him it's time for him to help her but not revealing the deep reason why. They are reconciled, but while on her father's barge they come across a shipwrecked sailor, Mat Burke, and Anna falls in love. So, dare she tell them the dark truth and risk everything?

O'Neill won his 2nd Pulitzer Prize for this play about love and forgiveness, charting one woman's longing to escape her past and her hope for salvation.

O'Neill's first version of this play, begun in January 1919, was titled *Chris Christopherson* and performed as *Chris* in out-of-town try-outs. It was not a success. O'Neill revised it in 1921, radically changing the focus from Christopherson to his daughter, changing her from a pure woman needing to be protected into a prostitute who finds reformation and love through life on the sea. The new version of the play, now titled *Anna Christie*, had its premiere on Broadway at the Vanderbilt Theatre on November 2, 1921, and ran for 177 performances, closing in April 1923. There have been many revivals including at the Donmar (2011) and Triad (2014).

This has been a challenging and exciting project to work on, stretching the talent of all involved. And what a great and talented group of actors, designers, stage crew and production team we have, all working to make sure we give full justice to this powerful, atmospheric drama. We are sure you will not be disappointed.

Jerry Lyne, Director
Photo Strat Mastoris

Apathy or Complacency

NVT AGM - 21 October 2017

On Saturday 21 October we had our AGM. Sadly, we were unable to start proceedings until almost 8pm, due to so few people attending, leaving us inquorate. Thankfully, we achieved the required 20 full members in attendance, and the meeting went ahead.

The constitutional change with regard to ceasing the option for Associate membership for new members was passed. It was also agreed that we should seek a modification to our licence to allow for up to 15 late nights per year, on either Fridays or Saturdays.

We have an increased number of vacant roles this year - see below. If you're suddenly filled with enthusiasm for any of these roles, or would like to know more about them, please contact any member of the committee.

- Box Office Manager
- Buildings Manager
- Fundraiser
- Health & Safety Manager
- Publicity & Marketing Coordinator
- Properties Manager
- Newsletter Editor – for a few months at least

Further details of the meeting will be available when the minutes are published.



NEWSLETTER EDITOR WANTED!

Do you have a few spare hours each month to collate and edit content, and put together NVT's monthly newsletter?

Natasha Borg stepped down last month after several years as Editor, and is looking for someone to take the reigns on a permanent basis - thank you for all your very hard work, Natasha!

Training on the relevant software can be arranged - or perhaps you'd like to take over the role and create something of your own!

Please do get in touch with Natasha via newsletter@newventure.org.uk

Bryony W, Ed for November issue

The Props Box

In a one-off series, this is just to let you know that...

Left over from Antigone, there is a spare bottle of stage blood in the Props Room, so if you're in need of a little gore, you know where to go.

It's more than fitting Sam Chittenden has chosen Canadian poet and classicist Anne Carson's 2012 version of Sophocles' *Antigone* to direct at New Venture Theatre. The two glove each other.

Carson's built up one part (Eurydike) and glossed words like 'unruly' for 'anarchic' and, yes, it's Carson-esque. But it's Sophocles, all right.

Chittenden and her cast revel in the sparse, lean tightness of Carson's version, a sparseness that's reflected in her design of the studio set too: in the round, with one dais and everything red and black (including, naturally, the scarlet seats), built by Simon Glazier and George Walter. Hannah Clark and Jackie Jones dress Antigone in timeless, loose garments and finally a white robe; men wear sharp suits. The chorus loaf about during the interval reading *The Times*, *FT* or *Sun*.

But two elements this production highlights show how keenly wrought this swift tragedy is. Lighting by Strat Mastoris – a keen classicist himself – focuses on a sifting down of sand from above as it pours, iridescent, though gloom: the illegal burial of an unquiet soul. This is the first of Deej Johnson and Charly Sommers' effects. Two other red lights, flickering blood, seem at first unsubtle, but these fade. Mastoris' effect (operated by Alex Epps) is dramatically tighter than other, professional, attempts (*Salomé* at the National, *Knives in Hens* at the Donmar), the staging of it by all concerned the most riveting opening to any Greek drama I've seen.

It's followed much later by the video displays of Rima Stankute, also designed by Johnson and Sommers. Three characters' fates imprisoned in stone are related through projections on the floor. It's effected for the most part quietly, and Tim Metcalfe's sound is spare, relatively in keeping with the production. The feel of Greek folk songs belies the sources quoted from Gravity, The Who, Tom Waits.

We begin with two sisters wrangling over the illegality of burying the one brother who attacked his own city, Thebes, killed by the defending older brother, both dying. One is accorded a state funeral, the other to be eaten by dogs and crows where he lies. One sift of earth seals his release to the underworld. So Antigone is hauled up before the new ruler, Kreon, her uncle, inheritor of the vacant throne.

Antigone

Directed by Sam Chittenden | review Simon Jenner



Defiant, she's condemned to death. The twist is his son Haimon, her fiancé, is not only distraught, but also defiant. Antigone might be resigned, for the moment, but what will she pull down with her?

Keziah Israel's superb performance in Brighton Little's *Earthquakes* in London means her Antigone has been

keenly anticipated. Her natural intensity suggests Greek drama is a place she'd inhabit: she exudes thought and mobility. What we have to lose is what her previous role displayed: quizzical humour and wry wit. Antigone shears off all that: we're left with someone whose plight is gradually wound up. The vocal timbre for Greek drama is tricky: Israel is expressive,



though her part allows little room to manoeuvre. Her final scene, instead of winding up to tears – as Fiona Shaw, for one, has noted – begins and ends in them. Nevertheless, it'll be wonderful to see Israel back in something Greek and snapping.

Inflexibly right and defiant, Antigone tells timid sister Ismene (Jessica Smith's warmly expressive voice of reason) that she has chosen life, Antigone herself death. Even Ismene's initial plea to die with her is refused. Antigone's not for anyone sharing in her posthumous glory.

One who recognizes this is Koryphaios, Lead Elder. Lewes Little stalwart Chris Parke's debut here is outstanding. He follows others' vocal leads, reacts with thought to every reflex of language, and moves as the compassionate voice of reason, delivering everything with crystalline sadness. His sense of impending tragedy is as palpable as the readiness on his face to avert it.

The other stand-out performance is Scott Roberts' Haimon, for much the same reason. He does indeed describe, as his bio suggests, an emotional arc: from baffled, supportive son through quivering recognition that his father Kreon is an unblinking tyrant whose new rule releases something appalling. Roberts reacts to Kreon, Antigone, and others with a sometimes explosive force that always builds visibly, registering keenly on his face.

Kreon's role constrains Des Potton (an outstanding lead in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* last year), as Antigone's does Israel. It's a potentially treacherous part, offering little flexibility and shading till the last scenes. He plays it in a slow crumbling.

Kreon's crumple arriving late on means we're subject to Potton's impressively rigid tyrant when some of the unpredictability he's brought elsewhere might have lit up some corners. There's a shocking moment when he closes in on Antigone; he might stand off beforehand just a bit. He does threaten as Kreon, though, as he should. And he does implode.

Claire Lewis' Eurydike is another matter. Carson's built the part up; it is small but devastating, a memorably still axis of grief around whom prophecies twist. Lewis registers news with appalling clarity – then everything in her silence tells you her action.

Toby Davies delivers messages with unhurried horror, Chris Knight's Guard is suitably truculent, and Jeremy Crow is ever reliable as another voice of compromised sanity. The Aristophelian joke is Paddy O'Keeffe's Teiresias accompanied by Maisie Chalk's Girl, who, despite being a Seer's Apprentice, is sadly reduced to scratching out the future in tablets as her master prophecies.

O'Keeffe's clearly on his trolley, "like a Beckettian tramp out of Dublin's Superquinn", as one audience member deliciously put it, loaded up with goodies for the cave. Fairy lights too. He holds one in his hand as he flashes it, blind himself, at the cringing Kreon – who here is animated and reactive. O'Keeffe, who's acted in Aristophanes' *Women of the Forum*, nears the muse of comedy, jacket stencilled with a paragraph of type like one of Carson's narrow prose-poems. O'Keeffe's famously a Shavian; that bright reasonableness shines through, an impatience with outmoded tyrants.

This *Antigone* is outstandingly conceived and, for the most part, executed. Chittenden will doubtless iron out the occasional awkwardness Greek tragedy besets productions with, but everything she touches is so clearly wrought with the text and sense of Sophocles' terrors that it would be wonderful to see what else in this canon she'd tackle. She projects tensile expectations, stillness and a powerful arc. With such a cast, with the same provisos, anything might be expected.

Simon Jenner

[Abridged from the Fringe Review website. For the full review, go to: <http://fringereview.co.uk/review/fringereview-uk/2017/antigone-4/>]

Photos by Strat Mastoris



Families! Don't you just love 'em? by Strat Mastoris

Antigone is one of the most thought-provoking of all the Greek tragedies. A whole set of themes - the relationship between the individual and the State, the role and status of women in society, the power dynamics within a family and the different perspectives of humans and Gods - are all examined by Sophokles in a highly compressed and relatively short play. This isn't a review of Sam Chittenden's powerful production - I designed the lighting so I'm too close to comment - but it might be a reply to those people who say, "Oh, I don't like Greek tragedy; it's inaccessible and it has nothing to do with life today".

Oedipus, who unwittingly married his mother Jocasta, bringing disaster to Thebes, has died in exile and his two sons, Eteokles and Polyneikes, have killed each other in a fratricidal war for control of the city. Eteokles had remained in Thebes, while Polyneikes was driven out and later returned with a foreign army to sack the city and reclaim his inheritance. Now both are dead, and the monarchy has passed to Kreon, their uncle.

He has decreed that, as a traitor, Polyneikes does not deserve the honourable funeral that his brother will receive, but that his body should be left to rot outside the city. For the ancient Greeks, this was an even worse punishment than it seems to us, as without proper burial, a dead person could not pass into Hades. Antigone, Polyneikes' sister, cannot accept this judgment, and sets herself against the king and the rule of law to do what she believes to be her duty, carrying out the necessary rites for her brother. Families! Don't you just love 'em?

Sophokles wrote *Antigone* almost two and a half thousand years ago, but it's right up to the minute in its themes.

For this is a play about how much The State should be able to demand of its citizens. King Kreon is adamant that the security of Thebes comes before any other consideration, and that harsh punishment for treason will discourage other potential dissidents. But of course it's his own interpretation of what is best for the city, and he's deaf to any alternative voice. It's an argument we've heard more and more over the past decade, with governments increasingly regarding individual citizens as either 'Us' or 'Them'. In this Manichean world view - "You're either with us or against us" and there is no room for the individual conscience. Disagree with those in power and you are labelled a 'Saboteur'.

It's also a play about gender. Antigone is a royal princess, but as a woman she cannot inherit the kingdom. A lot of the unbending fanaticism shown by Kreon comes from the fact that he is being opposed by a woman. He has to uphold the status-quo as a man as well as a king. This year of the Trump presidency has brought the issue right to the foreground, and I'm writing this piece the week after the revelations of sexual abuse by the movie mogul Harvey Weinstein.

But mostly it's about morality - about 'doing what is right'. *Antigone* always reminds me of a phrase from E M Forster - "If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country". After seeing a production a few years ago I looked up more about Forster's life and discovered that he was very interested in the Oedipus legend. In fact, in one of his short stories, *The Road from Colonus*, a character even nicknames his daughter Antigone. Colonus was where Oedipus went into exile from Thebes, and I am struck that this play probably had a part in influencing Forster's own morality and his pacifism.

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.

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.

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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
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- 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
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'The Messiah' by Patrick Barlow 07-16 December Studio				

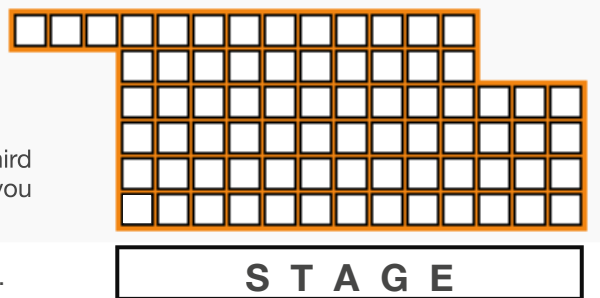
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*THEATRE UPSTAIRS ALLOCATED SEATING

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.



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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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