

NEW VENTURE

T H E A T R E

COMING SOON | THE FATHER by Florian Zeller | directed by Mary Allen | 15–23 March

THE LANGUAGE ARCHIVE

by Julia Cho | directed by Sam Chittenden | Friday 15 to Saturday 23 February 2019

'When we say a language dies, we are talking about a whole world, a whole way of life. It is the death of imagination, of memory. It makes me much sadder than I could ever possibly express.' - George

I read a lot of plays! That doesn't necessarily make it easy to choose a play to direct. I look for something new and surprising. Something sad and funny and challenging and/or beautiful. Happily I have several trusted sources of recommendation. Amongst these is Meghan Grover, who introduced me to American playwright Sarah Ruhl's *The Clean House* a couple of years ago, and who pointed me towards *The Language Archive*. Also American in origin, Julia Cho's play has a similar feeling of poetry and surrealism, and I fell in love with it on the first page.

2019 is the year of indigenous languages, so what better timing for us to stage this delightfully whimsical yet poignant play.

George is a brilliant linguist, consumed with preserving and documenting dying languages. And it is a Sisyphean task. As he tells us, there are sixty-nine thousand languages in the world. More than half are expected to die within the next century, and it's estimated that every two weeks, a language dies.

When describing the tragedy of lost languages and the lost worlds that they represent for him, George is eloquent and passionate.

But at home, he cannot find the words that will save his disintegrating marriage. In desperation, his wife Mary has taken to hiding hand written notes ('bad poetry') around the house (at least, we think they must be from her!).

Unable to get through to George, the exasperated Mary sets out in search of her own happiness, finding a new purpose through a chance meeting with a man at a station.



(L–R) Justine Smith, Alex Bond, Cata Lindegaard and Culann Smyth. Photo: Strat Mastoris

A purpose that subtly echoes one of the play's repeating themes - that of resurrection.

George's archival assistant Emma is mute with adoration for him. She visits a language instructor to learn Esperanto in the hope it will help her to communicate her love. The instructor has also been romantically disappointed, but has a different and important lesson for Emma to learn.

The archive's newest subjects, an elderly couple who are the last speakers of Elloway, the language of the river people, have recently descended into a huge argument about airplane arm rests, cooking and romantic rivals, and now refuse to utter a word to one another.

A magically inventive comedy, *The Language Archive* traverses the gulf between what's said and what isn't. Whimsical, melancholic, yet life affirming, it deploys the universal languages of Esperanto and love.

Julia Cho's script is a gem. A delightful mix of comedy and tragedy; a celebration of language and a mourning of what happens when languages, and communication, are lost. The story, seemingly simple at first, unfolds like a surprising fable or a mystery train ride.

Cho emphasises this unfolding by including doubling in the script as an artistic device rather than a pragmatic one, with five actors playing thirteen characters (two of our plucky actors playing five roles each!).

The Language Archive is the kind of play that cries out for theatricality, so we are extremely lucky to have Tim McQuillen-Wright's gorgeous set, creating a language archive that speaks of George's frantic desire to maintain order, and transforms magically into different spaces. Cleverly crafted lighting and projection by Keith Dawson and rootsy sound design by Simon Scardanelli add to the artisan vibe.

I have been blessed with an amazing cast and production team, and we have had a lot of fun bringing *The Language Archive* to life. We hope you love it as much as we do.

A final note – *The Language Archive* is about loss; about mourning things that end or can never be. But it is also about life, and the birth of new possibilities. Above all, it is about what we give each other; what we hand on to the people we meet and leave to future generations. In January my father Keith, who had been unwell for some time, quietly passed away. Among his gifts to me have been a love of language, theatre and the fantastical; gifts that have led me in turn to directing. His passions also included railway engines. Keith would have hugely enjoyed the intelligence and pathos of this jewel of a play. So, Dad, this is for you. <3

Sam Chittenden, 2019

LAUNDRY AND BOURBON / LONE STAR

by James McLure | directed by Mark Lester | review by Simon Jenner

Mark Lester makes his debut as director in James McLure's linked on-act plays *Laundry and Bourbon* and *Lone Star*.

McLure's real southern territory got flickering notice on Broadway for *Lone Star*, but he never made it back there. Like the very different Robert Holman, he has a following for making noise quietly.

These one-acters are quiet shouters: naturalist slices of hamburger life, riven with aspiration, desperation and an end to trauma. It's post-Vietnam. *Laundry and Bourbon* and *Lone Star* pass an hour each in real time across the lives of three women, then three men, variously struggling people in Maynard, Texas.

The first sets up the second, since Elizabeth the central character from *Laundry and Bourbon* is married to Roy, the protagonist of *Lone Star*. *Lone Star* in fact came first in 1979, paired with another short about injured Vietnam Vets that McLure then extended. McLure then retrospectively added *Laundry and Bourbon* in 1981 to play before *Lone Star*. Set in a backyard, it takes place hours before and during the latter's timescale in a downtown bar.

Simon Glazier and his team (George Walter and five scene-painters) use the simple reversible backyard of house, flat and naturalistic as a brown Hopper homestead, with the grey-scaled grotty backyard of a bar later, with a full moon up – appropriate since there's a real full blood moon at the outset of this run. Keith Dawson's lighting enjoys satisfying nuances in the second play, where night draws on.

Ian Black's sound bounces the melancholy twang of the



Isabella McCarthy Sommerville. Photo: pksyart@gmail.com

period wherever country and western meet bluegrass and pop. Pat Boxall's costume design wickedly digs at the accidental replication of two dresses, green with yellow sunflowers, and mid-seventies period dress, all run up by Sue Salt.

At a time David Mamet and Sam Shepard exploded onto the America theatre scene, McLure's naturalism closer

in mood to Shepard, was crowded into a shade. Lauded for its truthfulness it lacked the zany darkness Shepard found in similar scenarios, and indeed Shepard's refractory, complex scope and vestigially believable denouements. Nor of course would McLure even attempt the adrenalin-rush hassle of Mamet in his own ironic twists. There's a Chekhovian patience to McLure that's winning on its own terms and his writing will endure.



(L-R) Sarah Drew and Kate McGann. Photo: pksyart@gmail.com

Laundry and Bourbon

Sarah Drew's Elizabeth waits for her 'wild' husband Roy. We don't know for how long, nor does her friend Hattie, played to the hilt by Kate McGann as a noisy but well-meaning best friend. Elizabeth's patient, stand-by-your-man (even to accepting his flings) Hattie, dumped by her exciting lover Wayne, both admires Elizabeth for keeping up with the wildest (and sexiest) man round, and cajoles her for accepting his infidelities. But more importantly, there's that pink 1959 Thunderbird that exists as his freedom. Elizabeth frankly revels in recalling sex in the backseat beating any bed, and after ten years her own passion's undimmed, but she harbours (as we discover through each of the plays) two secrets.

Drew's capacity to draw in an audience to her small-scale ambitions, to hold on to and expand just a little of what

she has, is heart-warming, truthful portrayal. McGann's acetylene-blasting voice modulates to tenderness and reverie on occasion, lending this vibrant shadow of a role real chiaroscuro.

This interaction is a slow patient reveal between both actors. Drew allows us to see Elizabeth's capacity for patience, empathy, lack of material ambition is admirable whilst exposing her vulnerability: doormat status. It's not – as we find out – that Roy takes Elizabeth's love entirely for granted. McLure's gift is to portray the dilemmas of a couple still vibrantly in love after ten years. But there's unspoken conditions attached. They don't have children. And the car is one of Roy's lodestars, his 'pussy wagon' as he later terms it. Every engine cough brings Elizabeth anxiously out, but she knows that engine: it's never the one.

That's to anticipate. The similarly unspoken alliances between Elizabeth and Hattie are threatened when someone Hattie loathes – Amy Lee – arrives. Prosperously married (if for money), and wearing the same dress as Hattie, she makes everything in that straight-talking woman bristle like static up a nylon dress. To this bridge-playing enclave she's introduced the new game that will supplant it: mahjong. And she's brought it to Elizabeth without Hattie's knowing. The fall-out is explosive, and though things are just about patched up, it opens a new space where Elizabeth reveals something after Amy Lee's departure.

Isabella McCarthy Sommerville's catalyst Amy Lee is beautifully coiffeured and this describes her performance. Normally famed for front-and-centre intensity, she proves she's similarly adept at scratching comic roles such as here, and lends a little inwardness to a queasy character.

It's a play whose patience occasionally seems to hang fire, but that's when you need to be on guard. It certainly enriches what follows.



(L-R) Matthew Wyn Davies, Neil Drew and Cai Jones. Photo: pksyart@gmail.com

Lone Star

Cai Jones' Vietnam Vet Roy has done a bunk for several days. It's not that he's really run out on Elizabeth. We're here introduced to the full tragi-comic gamut of a man two years back from the war (so this is all 1975) and still not reconciled to a world where, as he wakes, men's heads aren't being blown off in front of him. Jones's expression seems even throughout, shell-shocked slightly, dazed but capable of unnerving re-enactments. Jones manages the leatherneck uprightness and sudden leather cracks with a rivetingly fazed nonchalance.

That's mostly at the expense of his slightly dopey brother Ray, who wasn't fit enough to join up. In Matthew Wyn Davies's wincingly fine portrayal, we're introduced to someone not quite savant-like, though he understands engines, hopelessly naïve, somehow slow to take up life. Until we find he isn't. Not quite. Never one to even rival his roistering brother's sexual conquests, he protests he's not quite a virgin. You might think this face-saving.

Chaffing though is nothing to the mirror-situation we've just witnessed in Laundry and Bourbon. Roy can't stand Cletis, here gawkily, embarrassingly well portrayed by Neil Drew. He wants heroic Roy's approval, but Roy can't stand him.

As Roy stumbles off briefly, Cletis makes a terrible confession to Ray, but begs Ray to deliver this to Roy. Faced with Roy again, Cletis flees. However, before he does this, Ray makes a confession of his own, one that is so astonishing it might be designed to ensure Cletis's misdemeanours fall in its shadow. and Ray fears Roy might kill him. Roy claims he loves his wife, his country and his car. He'll need to make some adjustments before and after he stumbles home to the most remarkable truth of all.

McLure proves here over his two plays he can command symbolism and naturalism in a compellingly believable way. It's more than good to have got to know this quiet master. Yet again NVT deliver small shrouded gems of Americana.

Review first appeared in www.fringereview.co.uk

CHARLES GILSON

1924 - 2018

*All the world's a stage,
and all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
and one man in his time plays many parts.*

It feels strange to be writing about Charles Gilson for the New Venture Theatre newsletter - this is the publication that he himself edited for eleven years, from 2004 to 2015: over one hundred and thirty issues in all. I'm more used to emailing him, requesting changes or corrections in pieces I'd written, and invariably getting a very calm and courteous reply. For Charles was a gentleman. But also a gentle man: warm and approachable, softly-spoken with his American accent; always seemingly in control of the situation.

But 'one man in his time plays many parts', and Charles Gilson had in his time been a warrior, a father, a business leader, a source of help to people in trouble - all before his connection with New Venture.

Charles was born in 1924 in Washington DC. After a glittering academic career, he enlisted in the US Army Air Force, qualifying as a pilot at the age of nineteen, then flying B29 bombers against the Japanese in the WW2 Pacific theatre. Following the end of the war, he spent time in Shanghai as a University student. In the succeeding years he worked for American Express, helping set up the credit card operation and overseeing its introduction in Europe. A lot of travelling; but Charles was also very much a family man, marrying and becoming the father of eight children.

Later, while still working for American Express, Charles became a volunteer with The Samaritans, and it was here that he met Anne. Anne tells how, when they first saw each other as participants on a training course, there was an immediate sense of connection between them, in spite of Charles being significantly older; and that Charles wrote her a long, courteous letter, telling her of his feelings but allowing her space and time to make her own decision. To me, that approach sums up Charles' whole personality. Suffice to say that they remained together for thirty-two years, making trips to many different countries as part of Charles' work and their own insatiable interest in different peoples and cultures.



'One man in his time plays many parts'. It seems that Charles appeared a few times on stage in an acting role - many years ago - but at New Venture he was a rock, supporting our many activities and being a hugely competent editor of our newsletter. He seems to have been a rock to many people - at his memorial service ex-colleagues and family members all spoke movingly about his leadership and his empathy. I shall miss seeing his face across the South Hall, in the bar during a play performance, or when he would help Anne oversee the stuffing of the newsletter.

Always a gentleman. I feel privileged to have had Charles Gilson as a friend - and I'm not alone in feeling that.

Strat Mastoris

PROPOSALS TO DIRECT FOR 2019/20 SEASON NOW OPEN

2018 proved to be another successful year for NVT. This meant many diverse productions giving plenty of opportunities for our company members to develop their skills, resulting in very appreciative audiences. It was dependent on all our volunteers pulling together and contributing so much. There have also been noticeable improvements to the building, including a wonderful new kitchen. The thriving acting class, often the introduction to the NVT for new, enthusiastic volunteers, has been going from strength to strength. Basically, all departments have done very well and we have been blessed with highly satisfactory box office returns. Now is the time to look ahead. One of the foundations of our creative policy

is to invite potential directors to put forward ideas for productions which are meaningful to them. It is this that gives rise to the wide variety of work that we do and it is the commitment of those involved that drives us to achieve the finest quality we are capable of. We are open to proposals for productions, whether from experienced or new directors and are currently inviting proposals for next season. Although our goal is always to be as successful creatively as we can, we must never forget that everyone involved should find working as part of an NVT team a happy and personally rewarding experience - and not just in our convivial, cheap and exceedingly well run bar! So, let's do our best to make 2019 another great year.

Rod Lewis

**We are now open for directing proposals for 72nd Season
October 2019 to July 2020
Our window for proposals closes on 16 February 2019**

NVT NEWSLETTER

As part of a review of the NVT publicity processes we have been looking at the newsletter and its value to our members. Suggestions have included stopping the newsletter and expanding the brochure, changing its current format to an email version only. However, it isn't a simple decision as the newsletter may be the only direct contact some members have on a regular basis. Therefore, this article is intended to give you, our members, the details and ask you for suggestions.

Currently we have a newsletter that is produced as a pdf document, which is emailed to most members each month (except August & September). It appears that on average about 30% of members actually open the newsletter, we do not have any figures for how many read it. In addition to the pdf version we have 150 copies printed each month. These are only in black and white, so the colour images are not as strong. Of these printed copies 25 are posted

to members who do not have internet access. The rest are available in the theatre and a number are read / taken by audience members.

What are the options?

- We could continue as we are if there is a desire for the newsletter in its current format.
- Change to a production based email with the coming production details only.
- Move to an online newsletter, which would have to be printed for members without the internet.
- Expand the brochure to replace the newsletter for audience members.
- Something else completely - suggestions welcome
- A combination of some of the above

Please let us have your thoughts on the newsletter and how you would like to see it in the future.

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 MEMBERSHIP

At the last AGM our membership rate was formally changed to £15 a year, after a successful trial. To renew, or join if you are not yet a member, just go to our website: www.newventure.org.uk/joinus

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: Members £9, Non-Members £10

Evening performances at 7:45pm | Sundays are Matinees only at 2:30pm | No performances on Mondays

Access to the Theatre Upstairs is only possible by 4 flights of stairs and therefore may not be suitable for those with mobility difficulties.

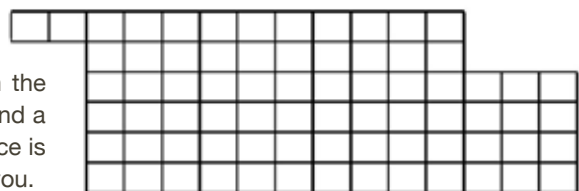
Cut along the line, and return your completed slip together with a cheque to: New Venture Theatre, Bedford Place, Brighton BN1 2PT

	date	member	standard	total cost
<i>The Language Archive by Julia Cho</i> 15–23 February <i>Studio</i>				
<i>The Father by Florian Zeller</i> 15–23 March <i>*Theatre Upstairs</i>				
<i>Pickwick and Weller by Barry Purchase</i> (With more than a nod towards Charles Dickens) 12–20 April <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 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.



CONTACT US

Bedford Place, Brighton BN1 2PT
www.newventure.org.uk @nvt_brighton

General Enquiries 01273 808353 • info@newventure.org.uk
Box Office Info 01273 746118 • boxoffice@newventure.org.uk

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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 the Newsletter Editor - newsletter@newventure.org.uk or by post to the New Venture Theatre.