

NEW VENTURE

T H E A T R E

SHORT PLAY FESTIVAL

AGENCY BY MICHELLE DONKIN
HOPE THAT PLAYS A TUNE ALONE BY SARAH DREW
MATCH AND MATRIMONY BY JUDEY BIGNELL

PREVIEW: SHORT PLAY FESTIVAL 2019

19–27 July 2019

A selection of quality writing over three new and diverse plays.

Three writers have been selected to each produce a 20–35 minute play. Judey Bignell, Michelle Donkin and Sarah Drew have been guided through an editorial process by

two professional writers and their plays have been passed on to three experienced directors, who have continued the development process to bring these plays to the stage in our Short Play Festival. All the writers, directors and their mentors have strong connections with the New Venture Theatre.

AGENCY

by Michelle Donkin | directed by Ian Amos

Agency is a play that draws upon up-to-the-minute issues; government, news, truth, lies. A press secretary turned whistle blower prepares to leave a destructive administration behind. The personal and the private collide as she faces a colleague for one last time.

Michelle Donkin writes that 'Agency was inspired by contemporary American and British political commentary. I often write about women and I was intrigued by President Trump's former White House Communication's Director,

Hope Hicks and the media's interpretation of her character.' It features two faces new to NVT – Victoria Thomson and James Bennison – and is directed by yet another new comer to working on the NVT stage, Ian Amos (although you might have seen him on the box office this past year).

Agency is a tense two-hander set in the murky world of politics and power.

Ian Amos

HOPE THAT PLAYS A TUNE ALONE

by Sarah Drew | directed by Mark Wilson

Set in a small English village just after the Second World War, *Hope that Plays a Tune Alone* by Sarah Drew sees life-long friends, Kitty and Elsa, supporting each other through their experience of the loss that war has brought. As Elsa says, 'You carry on. However you do it, you just keep going'. And that's exactly what they do. From the play's opening we see them engage in the sort of joshing banter and quiet understanding developed since they were at school together. It is no surprise then that when Kitty lets slip that she has, in fact, started a new relationship, Elsa's

response is one of encouragement, suggesting that love should be welcomed wherever it might be found. Observing Kitty's behaviour during a visit of the local parish priest, she is then quickly able to guess the identity of the man with whom her friend is involved. What Elsa only comes to recognise at the play's end, however, is the nature of that relationship and how Kitty has chosen to enact the advice about carrying on, 'However you do it'.

Mark Wilson

MATCH & MATRIMONY

by Judey Bignell | directed by Chris Gates

Being a huge Jane Austen fan, it is an absolute pleasure to be directing (and acting in) *Match & Matrimony*.

Originally, the writer Judey Bignell was considering a much more provocative title where the second word was 'Countryside'. It's lovingly written Jane Austen parody it began as a two hour play with 20 characters and a number of anachronistic parody songs based on contemporary artists such as Meatloaf and Robin Thicke. It was strongly reminiscent of *Pride & Prejudice*, though with six daughters

instead of five, all of whom had their own subplot and all of whom had their own object of love/heartbreak/frenzied lust. Obviously, for the purposes of the festival it had been scaled down somewhat, and it speaks of Judey's skill as a writer that this adaptation has lost none of the original's wit and romance, nor its wonderfully skewed presentation of Austen's characters and style. I'm absolutely delighted to be bringing this highly energised and hilarious piece to the NVT.

Chris Gates

Review: ELEPHANT'S GRAVEYARD

by George Brant | directed by David Eaton

review by Simon Jenner

Our Town. Gone mad. It's back. For those who missed last year's NVT rehearsed reading *Elephant's Graveyard* returns with the same director and nine of the 13-strong cast in a full production.

George Brant's dystopic vision – from 2010 – of two days in September 1916 in Erwin, Tennessee, really happened. Spark's Circus arrived, and an elephant was arraigned for murder. If you can call it either of those two things. 'There was a town. A man with red hair. An elephant' as the Ringmaster Martin Ryan informs us with a crackling nasal snarl. 'It's all about the investment.' People cheering on their feet are pipe dreams, be careful what you wish for. He relates the insurance claim for a Billy Smart elephant; and how it was then posthumously used again: stuffed till it fell apart into a ghost of itself. But this elephant's called Mary. And through a chorus of thirteen characters, we hear what happened.

You won't hear it from the red-haired man. A newcomer, he demands the right to lead with Mary, largest of the elephants, when the Trainer Shorty (Alice Ringholm Heder) would prove far more suitable. Mary spies a thrown-out

watermelon the Hungry Townsperson (Alex Williams) relates was there because the poor trash men finally went on strike. The red-haired man's enraged. The effect's disastrous. Talk about taking an elephant to crack a nut . . . without the gun.

As for an elephant in the room, director David Eaton has managed far more in the flexible NVT Studio space, with Richard de Costobadie on production with Bryony Weaver managing. Vanessa Barrett, Mark Green and cast member Naomi Horsfall's costume design has produced spectacularly seedy results – from the battered Mad Hatter's shorter top hat and hunting scarlet (not pink) of the Ringmaster, to the tatterdemalion rags of the poor, this is a full costume performance; striking, spare, original and strange. The tangerine overalls of the Steam Shovel Operator (de Costobadie) look almost period, Claudia Hindle's Ballet Girl (all sensually wrought in Mary's trunk that never loses its erection), Ben Pritchard's Clown: the overall scarlet/black detail of costumery is carried to Adam Kinkaid's scarlet/black scene painting with Julie Monkton's makeup prominent – not just on the clown. Keith Dawson's light design is unfussy, ideal for a straight choric production.



Left to right: Cata Lindegaard, Naomi Horsfall and Richard de Costobadie; photograph by Strat Mastoris



Left to right: Ben Pritchard, Diana Banham, Martin Ryan, Jamie Marchant, Claudia Hindle and Alice Ringholm Heder; photograph by Strat Mastoris

Stacy Frost's light and sound operation comes to the fore in balancing the live musicians: Becca Huggett the evocative singer, guitarist Adam Kinkaid and Neil Rocks on drums; their pieces particularly the finale, are evocative eldritch additions to the story. Period songs, new twist. Accents for the most part are starkly resonant, and rasp as authentically as my knowledge of place goes.

The townspeople demand a trial too. The cast stand facing a corner of the Studio. They rarely move – the Trainer does most of that, running off and on stage. Each character speaks out and virtually never to each other save by implication and commentary (the Tour Manager on the Ringmaster).

The play is then a chorus-line of disapprovals with slight demurrals – Heder's empathic and furious Trainer, and Joseph Cooper's Preacher. Heder, repeating her debut performance has much to do and is excellent. Ryan's of course the actor cracking the whip and his own voice: it's a tour-de-force. Diana Banham's Tour Manager offers a realistic hard-boiled watering down of the Ringmaster's almost maniacal obsessions with giving the public what they want. But she's a shrewder judge he concedes, of the most base instincts: and how to survive them.

Pritchard's Clown who has so much digging to do after his initial ball-spilling, invests his role with predictable humanity; it's what clowns are meant to crumble to.

Mark Green's excellent Engineer litanising the railroad's infinite possibility, metallicly snarls his disdain for anything un-mechanical. Being keeper of times, he can stop time. His mechanical hymns are evocatively horrid. You fear for his throat. Jamie S Marchant's Strongman looks like Rooster Byron and sounds Hungarian: his pique at being upstaged, his simmering, contained rage clicks as he snaps his fingers back and forth. Paddy O'Keefe enjoys a sojourn from Shavian socialism for which he's known, as the xenophobic Marshal (indeed Trumpety Trump). That's in contrast to the Young Townsperson Naomi Horsfall's more sympathetic lament – she makes an appealing curveball of sensibility.

Cooper's Preacher is a simple part but here invested with something like aching compassion, and a moving last appearance commenting on the other elephants' actions. He invests more roar than his predecessor in the part last year, and overall there's more propensity to vocal explosion.

Williams, too, as the Hungry Townsperson manages another voice of dissent. And he adds a chillingly eloquent coda. With all this fuss of hanging, townsfolk forget that black people were being hanged here.

Hindle's Ballet Girl is a vulnerable mix of sexual excitement, faux-innocence ('any way you want me') and dire need. What will she do if there aren't elephants? She'd rated them above diamonds as a girl's best friend. At the end, she wonders about diamonds.



Left to right: Paddy O'Keeffe, Martin Ryan, Joseph Cooper, Mark Green, Alex Williams and Adam Kincaid; photograph by Strat Mastoris

One stand-out is another more layered character, Cata Lindegaard's Muddy Townsperson. Someone submerged in want and loss shows at first despair, then horror, then anger then horror again. Her explosive outbursts really add a dimension and show this production's sheer heft, in only her second acting role. Initially it seemed Lindegaard might start on too voluble a grief, but she fines this down and shows pace, variety and something extra in her final moments; truly moving. De Costobadie's Steam Shovel Operator exudes at first a bored desire to see spectacle. By the end he's a witness to spectacular collective lunacy, exuding a sad stoicism, a determination to see it all through.



Martin Ryan; photograph by Strat Mastoris

When premiered in 2010 this work received baffled notices, indeed disdain. Then it won awards. Now it seems frighteningly prescient and its anniversary, 2016 seems to have brought the circus to the Whitehouse – as some cast members subtly signalled in hand movements. Beyond that moment though, this is still a cautionary tale. NVT should be proud. It's in their best American vein.

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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 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

IMPORTANT: YOU'LL SOON NEED YOUR MEMBERSHIP NUMBER TO BOOK TICKETS

Very shortly, a changeover will happen and booking ticket using your member's discount will require inputting your membership number and surname.

Queries?

Email: boxoffice@newventure.co.uk

or call: **01273 746118**

THE NVT ARCHIVE

As many will be aware over the past few years there has been a determined effort to record and collate the history of our theatre, it's productions and all the talented people who have been the beating heart of the place since 1947.

We have made excellent progress- though more needs to be done. Various gaps need filling and old photographs identified. But we are in a good place to move to the next

stage. The plan is to add all our productions to the new Archive pages on our Website which Ian Black is designing. Alex Epps and I want to put together a small team who would be prepared to use their skills to input information on to the Archives page and to help scan in programmes and archive photos.

Gerry McCrudden

gerrymccrudden@hotmail.com

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.

Performance sold out? Put your name on our standby list: boxoffice@newventure.org.uk or call 01273 746118

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

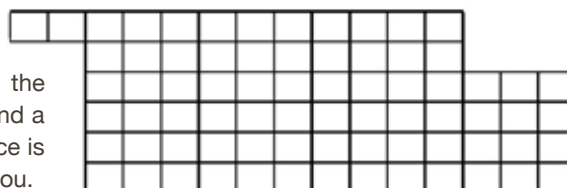
Short Play Festival 2019
19–27 July
 *Theatre Upstairs

date	member (£9)	non-member (£10)	total cost

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

*THEATRE UPSTAIRS ALLOCATED SEAT

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.

S T A G E

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