

# NEW VENTURE

T H E A T R E

## PREVIEW: ELEPHANT'S GRAVEYARD

by George Brant | directed by David Eaton | 14–22 June 2019

When Charlie Sparks brings his travelling circus to the little town of Erwin, Tennessee in 1916, he brings the wonders of his world. The lions, the tigers, the trained seals and, of course, the elephants. Shadrack, Penny, Sue, Little Mabel and, finally, Mary: the largest living land animal on earth (P.T. Barnum's 'Jumbo' having been killed by a freight train a few years earlier). But at this particular stop on his travels, Sparks will come to wish he had never unloaded his box cars or set up his big top.

Written by George Brant and first produced by the University of Texas in the Oscar Brockett Theatre, Austin, on November 16, 2007 with Brant himself playing the role of Ringmaster, *Elephant's Graveyard* was a play I came across purely by chance while I was studying theatre in Baltimore. I had been acting since I was 12, a middle school production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* being my first experience of treading the boards. My Bottom received a standing ovation, as I recall. Following that first occurrence, my passion for theatre carried forward into my studies, but I had never considered directing until I stumbled across this play at the Towson University library in my third year.

The story was so vivid, its characters so tangible, I could see each one of them so clearly in my mind's eye. I remember finishing the last page and just sitting there in silence (admittedly what you're supposed to do in a library) and imagining how I would bring this play to life. What costumes the actors would wear, how the stage would be laid out, the physicality and movements of the actors. It was all etched into my brain with such clarity that I knew I wanted to make it my own.

The play tells the true story of the only known public execution of an elephant, an event that was witnessed by nearly 3,000 onlookers at the railway yard in Erwin. Mary had become enraged with her handler after he kept hitting her tusk during a parade to keep her in line. She had thrown him from her back, walked over and crushed his head beneath her foot. She then grabbed his body and hurled it into the horrified crowd. In the show, the story is played out by members of both the town and circus, each one bringing their own perspectives and prejudices into their storytelling. At its core the production is a poignant and revealing play that sheds a harsh spotlight on mankind's lust for spectacle, violence and revenge.



Martin Ryan.

Photographer: Emma Bailey (ebaileyphotography.co.uk)

It has been an incredibly challenging but unbelievably rewarding privilege to have brought this play to life, and I would like to thank everyone that has made this possible.

David Eaton (Director)

### Back By Popular Demand!

Sometimes at NVT we insert into our regular season an additional rehearsed reading/performance of a play for a couple of nights. This is, by nature, experimental. It gives a director and a cast the chance to explore a script without the pressures involved in mounting a full production. Last year, David Eaton and a fine, large cast/company gave those that were lucky enough to see it a thoroughly enjoyable theatrical evening with their *Elephant's Graveyard*. We felt we really must include it in this year's schedule so that a wider audience gets the opportunity to see this highly original play, with its special blend of humour, sadness and compassion, and its truly moving reveal.

I recommend that you book early as tickets may fly – and I believe many who saw it before will be wanting to see it again – I do! Enjoy.

Rod Lewis (NVT Artistic Director)

# Review: HYSTERIA

by Terry Johnson | directed by Bob Ryder  
review by Simon Jenner



Dan Dryer and Lucy Mae Knight. All photographs by Strat Mastoris.

**I**f you're waiting for me to break the silence, you'll be disappointed!' Terry Johnson's a mercurial figure in theatre, his activity also punctuated by long silences whilst he directs, and surfacing with a masterpiece, usually several at once. In 2017 two plays including his homage to magical iconoclast Ken Campbell, *Ken*, confirmed his capacity for renewal, and a return to the stage after many years, playing his younger self.

Olivier Award-winning *Hysteria* from 1993 is a modern classic. It echoes Johnson's early (1982) masterpiece *Insignificance*, which features an unnamed Einstein, Miller, Monroe, and Roy Cohn (who also appears unambiguously

in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*). This time though three of the four are real, and the last, well, that's interesting.

Director and sound designer Bob Ryder employs the solidity of the NVT Upstairs. It features a single set, designed by Adam Kincaid. Freud's Hampstead study, French windows backstage centre, desk stage right, two rugs (one terribly valuable), and stage left the famous couch and a comfy armchair where when we open Freud dozes in. It's a rough semi-circle in red paintwork, with a door downstage left (opening onto a pale green landing), and upstage right a closet, where people cluster invisibly naked or with their trousers off. Books line the back walls either side of the

## COMING SOON: SHORT PLAY FESTIVAL 2019 19–27 July 2019

### AGENCY

by Michelle Donkin | directed by Ian Amos

### HOPE THAT PLAYS A TUNE ALONE

by Sarah Drew | directed by Mark Wilson

### MATCH AND MATRIMONY

by Judey Bignell | directed by Chris Gates

### THE COLOUR OF WATER

by Bryony Weaver | directed by Alex Epps

French window. Keith Dawson's lighting might look innocent but has cunning in store: more than diurnal effects on those French windows. Period costumes by Ellie Roser via Gladrags amplify the mad precision.

There's a little oil fire downstage right. And the lobster Freud picks up as a phone. And the 4,000 year-old phalluses wielded like Jedi-fighting. They're really impressive, nods a visiting surrealist. Antiques envy.

Summer 1938, Freud's escaped from Vienna but has cancer of the jaw, a chunk of the cancer left like the Nazis in Vienna, though unlike them (sadly) in formaldehyde. He's left elderly sisters too and blames himself for not leaving earlier.



Dan Dryer and David Peaty

Dan Dryer's Freud opens with those lines: 'If you're waiting for me to break the silence, you'll be disappointed!' which raises a laugh but of course is his analyst's opening gambit. He looks round. No one's there. Freud then asks his daughter Anna via speaker-tube about a young woman patient who's vanished. It's five am she reminds him.

At eighty-two, Freud aims to spend his final days in peace. He's just back from a very unexpected romp: Ben Travers' *Rookery Nook*. Except in the structure of the next two hours it never leaves him. His patients are thinning out; he's anxious to conclude all cases before he dies, so he's closed for new ones. But there's a waiting list he's not prepared for: first, a young woman hammering at the window – Lucy Mae Knight – whom he ignores. Till he can't.

*Hysteria* is a little world made cunningly – touching on Nazi

Germany, the Surrealists, Judaism, Freud's theories of the unconscious, family relationships, life, death, love and loss. Made cunningly into a farce. Its genius is shoehorning themes to an alien form and finding the perfect fit.

So when Stuart Curlett's Salvador Dali turns up to discover a less-than-fully dressed woman in the closet, peace becomes elusive. Oh, we're ahead of ourselves. Like *Rookery Nook* though, Dali really did turn up in Freud's Hampstead life.

And that girl at the window now, soaking, begging to be let in. She's his anima she tells Freud. Later on she's Jessica. Freud calls her many other things before he can call her that. Well she must be that young woman.

Arguing herself into a pre-session before referral, Jessica

replicates one of his case-notes. Freud's furious. Is she a student? Not quite. But she's attached to this case. So much so she blackmails Freud by stripping off and running into the garden naked, Freud pursuing her with her wet raincoat. She fakes an exit and raids a pink file.

So Freud's old friend Dr Abraham Yehuda (David Peaty) turns up: Jessica's bundled into Freud's closet. Yehuda speculates those under-garments in the garden couldn't possibly fit Freud's daughter. And Freud's tract on Moses being Egyptian? Yehuda will burn this little blue file. That's the plan. There's



Lucy Mae Knight, Dan Dryer and Stuart Curlett

a plot there, and someone swaps the contents.

Peaty exudes Yehuda's upright Jewish paternalism, which extends to Freud himself. Though shot through with compassion for Freud, there's fury at Freud's undermining Jewish identity with his Moses theory; and undergarments in Freud's garden. Well?

Naturally Dali arrives just as Freud's got rid of Yehuda. And we're back to two people in the closet as Yehuda returns with a disabled bicycle. Not long after Freud's got a Wellington boot on his hand, underwear in the other, and a bandage round his head to stop pain his jaw. Surrealism incarnate and Dali brings a gift, that painting of Narcissus with the egg-cracked head which he invites Freud to analyse – replacing Freud's Picasso with it above the desk.

This madcap Dali is the finest performance from Curlett I've seen. He transforms Dali's peacock narcissism through Johnson's exposing an egg-fragile ego under the farcical preening. Curlett's Faydeau-like timing, as he gets knocked out, kneed, assumes interesting poses and narrates how he – well, again he must be seen. Height and the kind of timing given to a hapless waiter crossed with a huge ego might scratch his immaculate surface. It gets madder so makes far more sense.

*Hysteria's* nub though is to question Freud's radical revision of his theories of hysteria. Before 1897 he concluded many women's psychological blocks were caused by sexual assault when children, including oral rape for instance here. After, he concluded these were fantasies. After all over half of Viennese fathers – including his own – would be guilty. And these are powerful men. Has Freud compromised a key insight out of expediency, or is it because he'd then incriminate his own father?

There's more cost than even Jessica can guess. 'That year . . . was the year that has been killing me' Freud concludes. And we conclude . . . should we break the silence?



David Peaty



Stuart Curlett

Dryer looks more in his nifty fifties but Johnson's playing with time. Summer 1938 isn't Kristallnacht's November – Yehuda brings that news. There's a reason and the team respond to this creatively. For instance, if Jessica was born in 1898 she would be forty, not twenty-nine as she proclaims and Knight seems to be. Dryer combines dignity with fluster, a teetering on the point of extinction flared up into one last madcap assault on the self. It's his maître d'hôtel role to restore balance, solitude, Thanatos even, crossed with lots of wild animus and anima that fuels classic farce.

Knight balances distress and knowingness, wildness with analytic inquisition. Just occasionally she's shouty with Dryer's Freud (when he raises his voice), though her finest suit, when she's wearing Dali's in fact, then even more her own again – is the implacable stripping of Freud, her core mission. There, Knight ensures her character's naked, but Freud's skin has gone. She's a superb nemesis.

Farcical and profound, so tragic it'll leave you weeping with laughter, this is a classic produced in the classic tradition of NVT at its best.

First published May 21, 2019 by Simon Jenner at [fringereview.co.uk](http://fringereview.co.uk)

# Audition Notice: GABRIEL

by Moira Buffini | directed by Gerry McCrudden

<b>Audition venue</b>	New Venture Theatre
<b>Audition dates</b>	Saturday 8 June and Sunday 9 June – 10 am to 1 pm and 2.30pm to 5pm Possible recalls on the Sunday afternoon
<b>Cast read through</b>	Wednesday 12 June
<b>Rehearsals</b>	From early July
<b>Performance dates</b>	Friday 4 October to Saturday 12 October; matinee performance on Sunday 6 October.

Guernsey. 1943. During the German occupation of the islands. A forgotten moment in British history. A young man, barely alive, is washed up on a Guernsey beach. Believing him to perhaps being an RAF pilot he is taken by the women of the Becquet family into their home and hidden. A dangerous and illicit action. As he recovers consciousness it is apparent that he is fluent in both English and German. But he has no recollection of who he is; British pilot or German soldier? Or is he an innocent or madman – saviour or dark angel?

The bonds between the women in the Becquet household are complicated – not always easy and set within a community in crisis (the Occupation). The arrival of the young man stirs up all sorts of feelings and resentments. The presence of a newly arrived German officer on the Island and the emerging relationship between him and Jeanne Becquet complicates matters further.

*Gabriel* explores the heart of memory, identity and imagination as well as the lies people tell themselves and each other to make the darkness light again. The action builds to a tense and dramatic climax.

## Characters (with approximate acting ages)

Jeanne Becquet (F)	A collaborator	45/50
Estelle (F)	her daughter	teenager
Lily (F)	her daughter-in-law	mid 20s
Margaret Lake (F)	her housekeeper	late 50s plus
Von Pfunz (M)	A Nazi officer	late 30s/early 40s
Gabriel (M)	A lost man	mid 20s

Both male roles will occasionally also speak some lines in German, so a knowledge or understanding of German could be useful, but do not let this deter you. There will be native German speakers on hand to help realise this element of the lines.

If you are interested in auditioning please contact the Director to obtain a copy of the audition form and to book

a slot. Also if you wish to discuss anything with the Director please contact him at:

**[gerrymccrudden@hotmail.com](mailto:gerrymccrudden@hotmail.com)**

Script extracts will be distributed at the audition. We are also putting the crew in place so please let us know if you are also interested in learning backstage skills by shadowing the technical/creative team.

## 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](mailto:gerrymccrudden@hotmail.com)**

# 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](http://www.newventure.org.uk), where you can sign up to our mailing list, or email: [actingclass@newventure.org.uk](mailto:actingclass@newventure.org.uk).

# 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](mailto: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](http://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](mailto:boxoffice@newventure.co.uk)

# NVT TICKET BOOKING INFORMATION

book online at [www.newventure.org.uk](http://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*

***Elephant's Graveyard*** by George Brant  
**14–22 June** Studio  
**Short Play Festival 2019**  
**19–27 July** \*Theatre Upstairs  
 (to be confirmed)

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**

# CONTACT US

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Our sponsorship deal is £250 for a year's advertising on our website and in our brochure, newsletter and programmes, plus 2 complimentary tickets for each production in that year.



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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](mailto:newsletter@newventure.org.uk) or by post to the New Venture Theatre.