

NEW VENTURE

T H E A T R E

COMING SOON

CHARMLESS by the New Venture Youth Theatre
directed by Chelsea Mountney | Friday 29 March

PICKWICK AND WELLER by Barry Purchase (& Charles Dickens)
music by Michael James | directed by Rod Lewis | 12–20 April 2019

THE FATHER

by Florian Zeller | directed by Mary Allen | Friday 15 to Saturday 23 March 2019

The *Father* portrays in a unique way how living with dementia feels; both for the father, Andre, as well as for his daughter and her partner. The daily challenges the condition creates are illustrated in this fascinating play through a variety of devices, constantly showing us the perspective of the affected person.

While the play is an acutely distressing portrait of dementia, it is by turns both humorous and moving. It shows Andre, while inhabiting a world of contradictions, capable both of a fierce lucidity and a senile cantankerousness.

The Father was first performed in Paris in 2012, the English premiere taking place in Bath in 2014. In 2015 it transferred to the West End, and was hailed as one of the most outstanding hits of recent years. It won ecstatic five-star reviews, and top listings in the Best Plays of the Year, winning awards in Paris, London and New York. *The Times* described it as 'a controlled unforgettable portrait of losing your mind', and the *Guardian* summed it up as 'a play that continually confounds expectations, and works almost like a thriller, with a sinister Pinteresque edge.'

I am very lucky in that I have a superb cast, led by Michael Bulman, and a terrific production team. Strat Mastoris has created an unsettling environment, echoing the state of Andre's mind. The rehearsal process has been both challenging and exciting, as collectively and individually we have faced and explored the feelings and issues that



Michael Bulman as Andre. Photographer: Strat Mastoris

arise when caring for an elderly relative with dementia. The cast have come up with numerous good ideas about the portrayal of this illness, and they have been a pleasure to work with.

I hope Florian Zeller would be proud of what we've done; and that you, our audience, enjoy this great play as much as we have enjoyed working on it.

Mary Allen, Director

Review: THE LANGUAGE ARCHIVE

by Julia Cho | directed by Sam Chittenden | review by Simon Jenner

New Venture Theatre's championship of recent American drama is so invigorating we take it for granted.

In the U.S. women dramatists are increasingly to the fore, particularly those who've won the prestigious Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. It's hugely prestigious, open to women writing plays in the English language. It's supported a generation including Annie Baker, Amy Herzog, Emily Schwend, Audrey Cefaly, Nina Segal, Clare Baron: all enjoyed London and West End productions in 2018.

So it's good to see a prizewinner from 2009 and a dramatist unknown to most of us. Julia Cho's *The Language Archive* follows the Midwest James McLure double-bill here in January. And it's as different from that as it is from nearly all these other writers. There's a whiff of a parallel with David Auburn's *Proof* mounted by NVT in 2017, though this is about languages, not theorems.

Naturally it's about love, too. Sam Chittenden's patient direction of this five-hander suggests misunderstandings between eleven characters unfolding in a rich stand-off. It's a brave new cast too. Though Bridgett Ane Lawrence as Mary, and Culann Smyth as Resten (and minor characters) are known from several productions, Cata Lindegaard, Alex Bond and Justine Smith are all quite fresh to acting, making NVT debuts too.

This is a teasing play with another central performance. Tim McQuillen-Wright's set is a magical bricolage of reference-drawers, in a rough pyramid that almost sings. There are features like a revolving section presenting granary bread, a bed complete with Resten sliding out underneath. Just a few repositioned chairs complete a supremely elegant set. The overall off-white's offset by Keith Dawson's spectrum dazzle of lighting which further morphs underneath. Simon Scardanelli's sound manages one of the most seamless envelopes of sound with any NVT set I've seen: with euphonies of lost tongues, or at a crucial threshold. Chittenden's naturalistic costumes pucker with old-fashioned timelessness.

Bond's George pursues dying languages before their last practitioners die. But a chance of hearing Elloway, language of the River People, is slipping away: George's latest subjects, Smith's Alta and Smyth's Resten won't speak it to each other because he won't eat her food and she's furious he took up the armrest in the airliner whilst travelling

here. They'll only curse each other in English. So the chance of their singing converse grows remote.

His wife Mary pursues George with mute written pleas she denies are hers, and giving up the struggle, meets an elderly man (Smyth) who's packed in being a baker. Meanwhile adoring linguist assistant Emma never tells her love for George, who himself compiles a despairing collage of declarations in all languages when he tracks Mary down to a bakery.

That's through hopelessly decent Emma, who's wandered there by serendipitous accident, distracted by the press of Esperanto, a universal language she learns from an instructor (Smith again, full of positive thinking) because George loves it. She creates a small acoustic surprise for George out of what she's learned, left lying around. But will she press her case after George presses the old cassette recorder?

Like several dramas, this is a play of two halves where the latter takes heart-stopping flight. The languorously unfolding first part at eighty minutes is too long. Chittenden's a master of unfolding and perhaps too patient with her material. She's mostly blessed with her actors and casting three unknowns is an act of courage and renewal which mostly works.

Lawrence as Mary lights up everything she touches; stifled emotions, shuddery tiny disavowals, the forlorn woman by the railway station. And finally the woman in the bakery radiant with new mission and pounding the bread – we're subjected to real flour and dough – every time her ex makes an asinine point.



Culann Smyth and Justine Smith. Photographer: Strat Mastoris

Lindegaard's Emma is moving: whether stifling ardent love, glowing and watchful in her supreme one embrace, anxious in her Esperanto lessons, and wondering when subjected – in a train-carriage dream – to its inventor Zamenhof (Smyth again). She appeals with a truthfulness and warmth that'll make her worth watching.

Coupled or solitary Smith and Smyth are consummately versatile. Whether Alta in silver locks, or the Instructor in her black helmet, Smith invents nonchalantly worldly accents: an amused tangy authority or imparting eastern folklore. For someone fresh to acting Smith too debuts with distinction.

Smyth too makes clean delineations. Whether querulous but good-humoured Resten, Baker the weary baker, even omniscient Zamenhof, the supreme language inventor turned optician: with a set of instruments he tests Emma's eyesight in a carriage. She's going blind with love he suggests. Emma's forever being examined.

By contrast Bond doesn't attempt the American around him and this works. Playing George as a flustered English academic in bow-tie and corduroy, Bond's cast in a part where hesitancy and bewilderment is key, and – a former West-End dancer – he inhabits George's fussy orbit with aplomb. He's still feeling his way vocally; this tends to slow the first half, though as ever it's a word-perfect production.

The second act was indeed almost another world. The quick cuts, deft use of a set that now dis-assembles in part, that bread baking, life decisions. Each character projects their storyline to a distant future.

Finally Cho steps further away, ending with a narration of outcomes which echoes Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. Or more distantly George Brant's *Elephant's Graveyard*, given rehearsed readings here last year and returning fully in this. I wonder why Cho doesn't start with a mute suggestion of her end, which could easily dispel the slightly



alien effect – not really Brechtian – at the conclusion.

(Top) Bridgett Ane Lawrence and Alex Bond.

The Language Archive is a play of enormous reach and ambition that mightn't quite realise its potential, or perhaps reach the potential it ends with. Cho might have earlier refracted more complex themes she's already touching. It's far more important to see plays like this though than deadly work ticking all functions. Chittenden too confirms her boldness and tenderness. She never accepts the comfortable, something informing her own dramatic writing. We can only look forward to what else she – and ensemble members – go on to achieve. And we need NVT to continue presenting us with plays like this.

(Above) Cata Lindegaard and Justine Smith. Photographer: Strat Mastoris

Review from www.fringereview.co.uk

CHARMLESS

by the New Venture Youth Theatre
directed by Chelsea Mountney
Friday 29 March 2019

There once was a princess and after much strife she lived happily ever after...
BORING!

A new darkly comedic, teen movie take on a classic fairy tale. Come and join the Ugly Club and other colourful characters for a drastic retelling of Cinderella.



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

Hello, all you lovely Members! It's your friendly Box Office here . . . ready to update you with the latest when it comes to booking your tickets.

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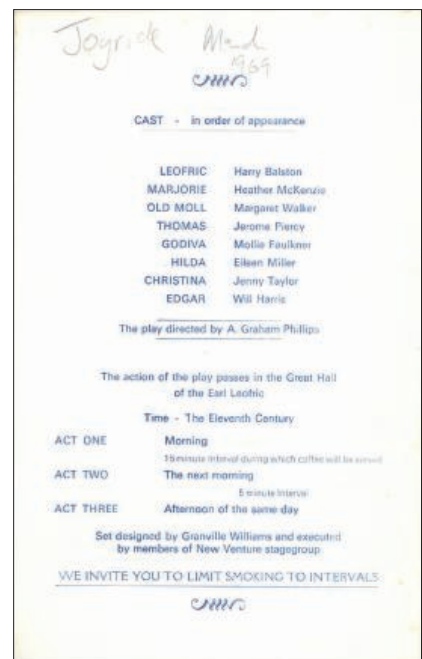
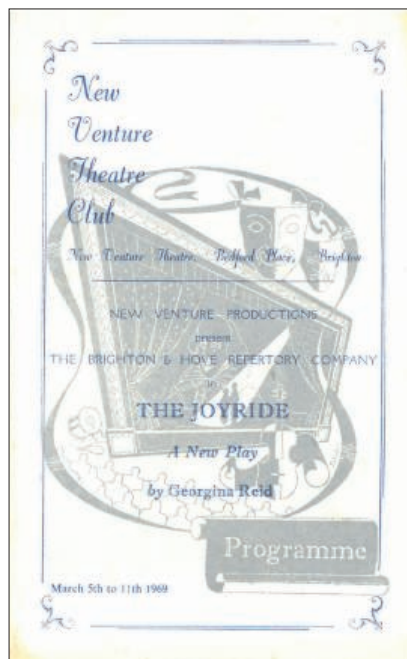
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Queries? Email: boxoffice@newventure.co.uk

THE NVT ARCHIVE

The NVT is looking into digitally recording and storing the archive that Gerry McCrudden, Alex Epps and others have been collating over the past few years. Look out for an announcement soon if you would like to help out with the archiving process.





From the archive: THE JOYRIDE

by Georgina Reid | directed by A. Graham Phillips

Wednesday 5 to Tuesday 11 March, 1969

Some of the credit for the success of "The Joyride" by Georgina Reid, performed by the Brighton and Hove Repertory Company on March 5 must go to Granville Williams for his inspired set. The Great Hall of the Earl Leofric was so convincing, had such a satisfying authenticity as to transport the audience into the 11th century with ease.

Here Lady Godiva and her Lord are found plotting the ride that is to give them their place in history. But according to Georgina Reid in "The Joyride" the historians have quite spoiled the story and her delightfully witty account of what really happened is much more fun. . . . This is an amusing and very well constructed play in three acts admirably acted and produced by this fine company of players.

Excerpt from the review from The Stage, 13 March 1969

New Lady Godiva
The Stage theory 13/3/69

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The noble Earl is only too anxious to lower taxes but wants his wife to make this gesture in order to earn fame and also fulfil the destiny predicted by Old Moll, their amiable resident soothsayer cum witch who is visited by visions when hungry. Although obedient and loving Lady Godiva dreads riding out clothed only in her long, blond hair.

Her mother is equally opposed to it when she arrives with her dark-haired younger daughter and son-in-law. These two have not consummated their marriage because each believes the other too pure and unsullied for such earthy urges as sex.

Peeping Tom in this tale is Thomas the house servant in love with Marjorie the maid who dreams of a brave and courageous lover. What Tom sees on his famous snoop convinces him that the naked lady on a horse is not Lady Godiva. Forced finally to reveal this fact we find that Tom isn't certain who did make the ride.

This is an amusing and very well constructed play in three acts admirably acted and produced by this fine company of players.

CAST

'THE JOYRIDE'
 Play by Georgina Reid. Presented by New Venture Productions and performed by the Brighton and Hove Repertory Company at the New Venture Theatre, Brighton, on March 5. Directed by A. Graham Phillips.

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 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

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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.