

# NEW VENTURE THEATRE

newsletter  
march 2020

Preview: Quartet [1](#)  
NVT 2019/20 Season [2](#)  
Review: Talk [4](#)  
NVT Calendar [8](#)  
White Noise Machine [10](#)  
The Herd/Consent [11](#)  
Short Play Night [12](#)  
Harwood on Quartet [12](#)  
Contacting the NVT [13](#)  
NVT information [14](#)  
Booking tickets [15](#)  
Our sponsors [16](#)

Bedford Place, Brighton BN1 2PT

Preview

13–21 March 2020

## QUARTET

by Ronald Harwood

directed by Richard Lindfield

As a veteran myself, there is something very special about working with other old, or perhaps I should say older, theatricals. Because we have given up gainful employment, we can rehearse in the morning and be tucked up in bed with our cocoa when other productions are still hammering away at their lines. And there are no parking problems. We all get the bus to Bedford Place – for free. This is for both cast and crew (apart from Max the lighting kid), a bus pass production.

So what drew me to *Quartet* for my first shot at directing for NVT? Well, it's moving, it's funny, it's not too long and it has a joyous ending to send everyone into the bar happy.

Most people think *Quartet* was a film first – indeed Dustin Hoffman chose it for his Hollywood directorial debut – but,



like many movies, it started life as a play, written by Ronald Harwood, perhaps best known for his theatrical tour-de-force, *The Dresser*.

*Quartet* tells the story of Jean, Cissie, Reggie and Wilf, who were once the

*continued overleaf*

- October 4-12 **Gabriel** by Moira Buffini
- November 1-9 **Fen** by Caryl Churchill
- December 5-14 **Great Expectations** by Charles Dickens
- January 17-25 **The Winterling** by Jez Butterworth
- February 14-22 **Talk** by Mark Wilson
- March 13-21 Quartet** by Ronald Harwood
- March 27 White Noise Machine** by NVYT
- April 17-25 **The Herd** by Rory Kinnear
- May 15-23 **Consent** by Nina Raine
- June 19-27 **Miss Julie** by August Strindberg
- July 17-25 **Hangmen** by Martin McDonagh

### Air conditioning for our Upstairs Theatre

Planning is well under way to install an air conditioning system in our Upstairs Theatre, which will hopefully make both watching and rehearsing plays during the summer months a lot more comfortable. The cost is expected to be between £15,000 and £17,000, and we hope to raise a substantial proportion of that from grants and a number of fundraising activities.

Our application for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent has already been submitted to B&H Council and, although their procedures are subject to some delay at present, we hope the installation can take place before this year's temperatures reach their peak.

All donations greatly received!

### Preview continued

## QUARTET

glittering stars of the Covent Garden Opera, but are now nearing their final curtain call.

They are, however, making something of a minor comeback as their iconic 1971 recording of the *Quartet* from Verdi's *Rigoletto* has just been re-released on CD and downloads.

Currently three of them are seeing out their days in the peace and tranquillity of Sir Thomas Beecham House, a genteel home for retired opera singers. That peace is about to be shattered by the arrival of Jean, the diva of the group, whose marriage to Reggie was poisonous and short-lived.

Once a year, the residents combine their fading talents in a concert to celebrate the birthday of the opera composer, Giuseppe Verdi. Now the famous foursome are reunited, will they revive the *Quartet* for one last hurrah? You'll have to buy a ticket to find out (no spoilers here).



**ABOVE (LEFT TO RIGHT)** Raymond Tongue, John Hartnett, Sheelagh Baker and Ann Atkins. (Photo by Cata Lindegaard)

It has been a real gas working with my co-conspirators Ann Atkins; Sheelagh Baker; John Hartnett and Raymond Tongue. Also watch out for Carol Croft whose fleeting appearances occasionally elevate the show into Quintet.

This might be the first time I have directed at the NVT but it is not my debut at the New Venture. Many years ago, when the Little Theatre was being rebuilt, we performed at various venues across the

Brighton, including here. I remember carrying loads of stones backwards and forwards across the floor of the studio theatre as Max in Martin Sherman's *Bent*. Ah – no wrinkles and dodgy knees then.

One final tip. Don't be late or you'll miss the pre-show concert of opera favourites performed by Sally Wilson (soprano) and Samantha Brennan (mezzo), accompanied on the piano by Gary Nock.

**Richard Lindfield (director)**

# TALK

written and directed  
by Mark Wilson

Mark Wilson's *Talk* enjoys a fine pedigree. Originally a Radio 4 drama, it's taken theatrical shape first in Canterbury, then the Edinburgh Fringe. It's next scheduled to be performed in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Southwark's old Bethlem mental asylum in the 1850s had already stood for 600 years, though it was soon to be pulled down. So what is once-famous artist Richard Dadd (1817–86, played by Bill Griffiths) doing in the criminal wing,

alongside Janice Jones' fellow-patient Emily Clayton? They shouldn't mix. In fact they're the two prime candidates for a talking cure, pioneered by James Macauley's Dr George Haydon, presided over by young, ambitious Dr Charles Hood, played by Matteo Bagaini making his debut outside university. Like Dadd, these doctors did more or less what the play proclaims.

**BELOW (LEFT TO RIGHT)** Janice Jones and Bill Griffiths. (All photographs by Strat Mastoris)



They're up not just against a Government Commission for Lunacy, whose acceptance or denial of their proposals will determine the future of mental distress treatment. They're also vigorously, stubbornly resisted by their apparent subordinates, Hazel Starns' Matron Janet Grey, and Adam Kincaid's Attendant Sam Fowles.

Written and directed by Mark Wilson, the Studio space is swept back for an in-the-round experience of visceral power. Actors – sat cheek-by-jowl next to the audience – leap up as vividly costumed figures against a neutral ground offsetting their brilliance with a fluid dark. It's swept by lighting and rigging by Strat Mastoris and Carol Croft. Sound design and operation is by Ian Black and Erica Fletcher, usually

inserting a still-point of music, like Chopin's Nocturne Op 9/1. Sumptuous costume design is by Lindsay Midali, Richi Blennerhassett and Jackie Jones.

Between each of the three pairs there's cross-tensions. Whereas the mostly silent Kincaid in his role as enforcer Fowles is a ferocious adjunct to Starns' Matron Grey, Starns herself is both traditional restrainer and a querulous witness. She extols the virtue of restraint as pacifier, arguing that disturbance and bringing emotion up harms patients further. She's unsympathetic but seems occasionally to prove her point. Starns is superb in adamant pose, delivering chiselled damnation.

**BELOW** Hazel Starns, James Macauley, Janice Jones and Adam Kincaid.





## TALK

Her doubts are faintly echoed surprisingly by Bagaini's Dr Hood, a young, ambitious man anxious for reform but perhaps even more anxious, Grey suggests – etching in acid – to make his reputation. Bagaini ably conveys Hood's own vacillation in a quietly impressive debut. Though senior to Haydon, he's junior in progressive instinct but knows how to edge pragmatic enlightenment.

The clash between the doctors is modelled by Wilson with a thrilling understanding of just what was at stake, and what still is. Haydon's journey isn't just as a progressive fighting and compromising, with dangers of disaster. Wilson shows how he learns from his patients, and from Clayton in particular, almost a doctor herself, who realizes the value of silence, of active listening. Macauley's performance conveys what it's like to be pulled four ways: to Grey, to Hood, to the patients, to his own occasionally flawed – or say unformed – instinct. Macauley radiates a man who feels the world's half in darkness, but himself being led, humbly, to the light.

They key performances though are rightly the two patients. The most celebrated of Dadd's paintings came from after he was committed in 1843 at twenty-six for killing his father in a fit of paranoia. Three siblings suffered similarly; his treatment was relatively enlightened. Most of his masterworks were painted during his lifelong incarceration. One is *Contradiction*:

*Oberon and Titania* from the drama's period of the 1850s, another *The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke* (1855–64). Close-up hallucinogenic, fantastically detailed they parallel the Pre-Raphaelites, anticipate symbolism and surrealism, crossed with a tiny bit of Breughel – though wholly self-generated. Dadd's like Millais on acid.

Griffiths manages to convey initial stiffness and almost frightening despair in his towering frame with a mix of nobility and sudden hurt. He modulates his voice between high terror and sotto-voce eloquence. He's riveting, especially when groping eloquently towards his own light, he bounces off Macauley and Clayton. He gives a masterclass in poise and a man awkward in his own body. His final breaking down into release is intensely moving.

As is Jones, who's equally compelling as Clayton. At first robotically repeating her now ex-husband's nostrum about her writing poetry as 'poetry disrupts the ordered home', we discover she's been incarcerated for a different reason. As she expresses it to Macauley: 'Well, I've come to wonder if it's all part of a system in which a man can be incarcerated for losing his mind, whilst a woman can suffer the same fate for daring to demonstrate that she has one.' Clayton's slow rise to radiant lucidity is marked on Jones' face, as she raises it to a brief stunning eloquence, fitfully revisited when comforting Dadd.



In their great but gentle encounter Dadd and Clayton interrogate memory and language with probing devastation. For Dadd it's about loss, but how can you paint that? Memory is the recovery of knowing loss, language the means to open it into self-realisation; ultimately in Dadd's case learning to live with your actions and understanding why you're here. Clayton suggests 'Hell must be a heart filled with unheard stories.' It becomes her and the play's signature moment.

Revelations – brutally cut short by the intervention of Grey and Fowles – effect a peripeteia. Dadd has gained full consciousness. But Clayton's now confined to solitude: she's threatened with encroaching numbness and distraught inarticulacy. In a touching

**ABOVE** Matteo Bagaini and Hazel Starns.

final meeting she flickers back from her ritual opening gambit, her husband's nasty nostrum about poetry disrupting the ordered home, and into superb eloquence, whilst Dadd's promised a new liberal regime at the just-opened Broadmoor.

It's a drama of cauterised optimism, bleak gestures to futurity. As a study in groping towards enlightened medical practice, with all the conflicts between doctors, their conservative juniors and seniors and the talking with patients who educate them, Wilson and his team triumph in a whisper, and a restraining cry.

First published at [fringereview.co.uk](http://fringereview.co.uk) on February 20, 2020

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

March

Acting class 7:30pm 2

3

4

5

NVYT 4:30pm 6

7

Sussex Playwrights 6pm  
Hangmen recalls 1

Acting class 7:30pm 9

10

11

12

NVYT 4:30pm  
QUARTET 7:45pm 13

QUARTET 7:45pm 14

QUARTET 2:30pm 15

Acting class 7:30pm 16

QUARTET 7:45pm 17

QUARTET 7:45pm 18

QUARTET 7:45pm 19

NVYT 4:30pm  
QUARTET 7:45pm 20

QUARTET 7:45pm 21

22

Acting class 7:30pm 23

24

25

26

WHITE NOISE  
MACHINE 7:45pm 27

28

29

Acting class 7:30pm 30

31

April

1

2

3

GLADRAGS 4

Sussex Playwrights 6pm 5

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15

16

NVYT 4:30pm  
THE HERD 7:45pm 17

THE HERD 7:45pm 18

THE HERD 2:30pm 19

20

THE HERD 7:45pm 21

THE HERD 7:45pm 22

THE HERD 7:45pm 23

NVYT 4:30pm  
THE HERD 7:45pm 24

THE HERD 7:45pm 25

Cast Iron Theatre/NVT  
SHORT PLAY NIGHT  
7:45pm 26

27

28

NVT NEW  
SEASON LAUNCH 29

30

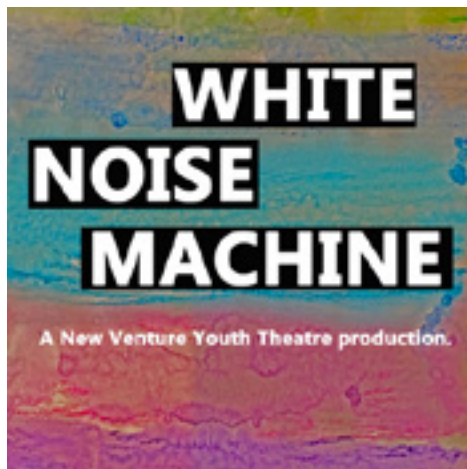


# WHITE NOISE MACHINE

by the New Venture Youth Theatre  
directed by Chelsea Mountney

I'm so excited to see the students of New Venture Youth Theatre return to the stage with their abstract piece *White Noise Machine*.

The students are an incredibly creative and proactive group, through discussion the cast decided that on this project they wanted to focus on themes revolving around mental health in the modern age. The title was thrown out there by one of the students and we all just fell in love with how broad we could be with the subject matter under the umbrella of "white noise machine"!



This group are particularly interested in turning their ideas into less traditional pieces, I know that some of the work of DV8 have been a huge inspiration to them, and their curiosity for working with movement and sound as well as writing their own text has been so exciting to witness. I feel their viewpoints and personal outlooks bring such a fresh perspective to this subject, it's such an honour to be able to help shape their

thoughts into scenes. It's been such a joy seeing their ideas develop into this unusual and thought-provoking show!

*White Noise Machine* is going to be performed for one night only on the 27th of March, tickets are only £5! Come and support this inspiring group of students!

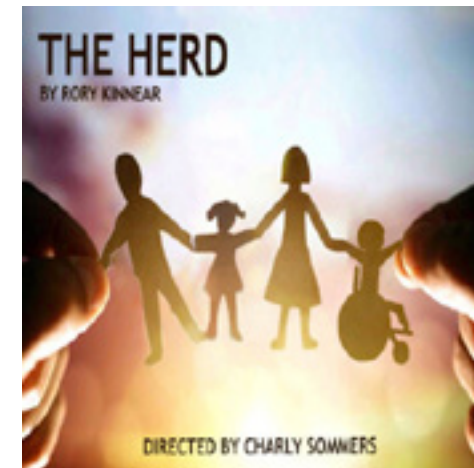
**Chelsea Mountney (director)**

# THE HERD

by Rory Kinnear  
directed by Charly Sommers

As Carol prepares to celebrate the 21st birthday of her severely disabled son, Andy, the rest of the family gather: Andy's older sister, their grandparents . . . and Ian, Andy's absentee father who is loathed by everyone in the room.

While Andy and his caregiver make their way to the house, ranks close and wounds open . . . Written by Rory Kinnear, *The Herd* is a witty, heartfelt portrait of a family brought together and torn apart by circumstance and secrets.



# CONSENT

by Nina Raine  
directed by Scott Roberts

A woman says she was raped on the night of her sister's funeral. The accused claims that she consented. Edward, the barrister acting for the defence, is a friend of the crown prosecutor, Tim. As they navigate their way through just another court-case, their own personal lives are unraveling. Tim thinks he has a ghost in his flat and Edward's marriage to Kitty is already under strain, before she accuses him of something unforgivable . . .

*Consent*, Nina Raine's powerful, painful, funny play, sifts the evidence from every side and puts Justice herself in the dock. It premiered as a co-production between the National Theatre and Out of Joint, directed by Roger Michell at the National Theatre in 2017, and transferred to the West End in 2018. It was shortlisted for the 2018 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize.

# SHORT PLAY NIGHT

Cast Iron Theatre/New Venture Theatre

An evening of script-in-hand performances of new work selected from the best and the brightest local, national and international writers – every quarter! Expect a night of play reading delivered on a black box stage; a celebration of words, story and writing.



## Article

# HARWOOD ON QUARTET

Success is fickle mistress. It is life-enhancing while it lasts, but once the applause has died away and the fame is a distant memory, what do the fading stars have to live for? That's one of the themes of Ronald Harwood's *Quartet*.

His inspiration for the play was a documentary called *Tosca's Last Kiss*. It was about Verdi's house near Milan which he left in his will as a retirement home for old opera singers and musicians.

Harwood says he saw it and then forgot it. It was only years later the documentary came back to him as an idea for a play.

In a recent interview with TheArtsDesk, he said: "I know more of actors than old opera singers but performers are performers. The terrible thing about an opera singer is that the career is short because the voice goes."

Harwood says the story is also about tolerating old age and not giving into it.

It is undoubtedly a wonderful, but at the same time, challenging vehicle for older actors. In essence they have to learn a quarter of a full-length play each, no mean feat for a performer in their prime, let alone for performers in their senior prime.

Donald Sinden, who played Wilf in the original production at Guildford's Yvonne Arnaud Theatre back in 1999, told me after the first dress rehearsal the director gave the cast one note: "Go home and learn your effing lines".

I am delighted to say the NVT cast of *Quartet* have been assiduous in learning their effing lines.

**Richard Lindfield (director)**

## Contacting the NVT

The New Venture Theatre  
Bedford Place  
Brighton BN1 2PT



[@NewVentureTheatreBrighton](#)



[@nvt\\_brighton](#)



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\*Asterisks indicate trustee committee members.

## NVT information

### 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)

### 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

Membership is £15. To renew, or join if you are not yet a member, just go to our website:

[www.newventure.org.uk/join-us](http://www.newventure.org.uk/join-us)

### Our sponsors

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

### New treasurer for the NVT needed

After many years successfully steering NVT's finances, our very fine Treasurer, Iain Hay, will be standing down later this year, when we find his successor.

The role would be ideal for a suitably

qualified or experienced person who has time to volunteer to work for a registered charity. The role typically requires a commitment of around 3 hours per week (more at certain periods). Please contact:

[volunteering@newventure.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@newventure.org.uk)

## Booking tickets

### TICKET PRICES AND PERFORMANCES

Members £9

Non-Members £10

(*White Noise Machine* is £5 for adults and £3 for under 16s)

Evening performances at 7:45pm

Sundays are matinees only at 2:30pm

There are no performances on Mondays aside from Monday 18th May for *Consent*.

### HOW TO BOOK TICKETS

You can book online at:

[www.newventure.org.uk](http://www.newventure.org.uk)

or by post using the form below

**Please fill in both sides of the form**

### CONTACTING BOX OFFICE

Box Office (answerphone only):

01273 746118

For all ticketing enquiries, please email:

[boxoffice@newventure.org.uk](mailto:boxoffice@newventure.org.uk)

### STUDIO THEATRE SEATING AND ACCESS

The Studio has unallocated seating.

There is one step at the entrance to the theatre.

### THEATRE UPSTAIRS SEATING AND ACCESS

The Theatre Upstairs has allocated seating; please use the seating chart overleaf and indicate your first, second and third choice seats using 1s, 2s and 3s respectively, and fill out your contact details below. Access to the Theatre Upstairs is only possible by 4 flights of stairs and therefore may not be suitable for those with limited mobility.

**CUT ALONG THE LINE, AND RETURN YOUR COMPLETED SLIP TOGETHER WITH A CHEQUE TO: NEW VENTURE THEATRE, BEDFORD PLACE, BRIGHTON BN1 2PT**

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

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Production	Date	# Members tickets (£9)	# Non-member tickets (£10)	Total cost
<b>QUARTET</b> (13–21 March) Studio theatre – unreserved seating				
<b>WHITE NOISE MACHINE</b> (27 March) Studio theatre – unreserved seating	27 March	# Adults (£5):	# Under 16 (£3):	
<b>THE HERD</b> (17–25 April) Theatre upstairs – mark seat preference below				
<b>CONSENT</b> (15–23 May, including Monday 18th) Studio theatre – unreserved seating				

	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10	F11	F12		
Write '1', '2' or '3' for your first, second and third choice seats. Seat F1 is normally unavailable.	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	E10			
	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9	D10	D11	D12	D13
	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C11	C12	C13
	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	B9	B10	B11	B12	B13
	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10	A11	A12	A13

STAGE

EXIT