

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Spring/ Summer 2025

New Venture Theatre newsletter



Welcome from the editor

Annabel Fenton

Uprooting to a foreign country and a new city is always an inherently unsettling experience. In November 2021, I found myself in Brighton for the first time, starting a new life: learning the intricacies of the Lanes, how to avoid seagull attacks, and trying to latch onto new forms of belonging - things, people, places and feelings that make me feel at home in a different hemisphere.

Stumbling into the NVT some months later, with my sights set on an outlet for my “dramatic” tendencies, I didn’t quite know that a small community theatre in a historic school building would play such a pivotal role in this abstract notion of place-making. As such, whenever I start to tell people about my acting classes and the productions that NVT puts on, “community” is central to the narrative. Because, as so many contributors to this issue highlight, what makes being a part of NVT so unique is the sense of place it evokes. This random collection of strangers have come together with a shared passion - the stage - and have agreed on a shared vision for art’s sake. That is pretty special.

In the three years since arriving in the UK, I’ve made many friends, but I still find the community at NVT special, and it gives me a connection and “sense of place” on the South Coast. Attending acting class, helping with some publicity last year, and now editing the newsletter, I’ve gotten to know people I would never have met otherwise: people who are different to me in age, life experience and political view. Being able to connect over a shared love of stories and the stage has built a sense of camaraderie which bridges some of those divides, while allowing me to develop a more nuanced understanding of the tapestry of human experience.

With “Behind the Curtain”, I hope to capture some essence of this sense of place, and share it with NVT members, friends, and the wider community. Now more than ever, it is vital that we band together and find hope in our locale, and art has always been a great way to do that.

CONTENTS

- 03 Forthcoming productions
- 05 From Page to Stage
- 08 Information
- 09 Spotlight: Kasha Goodenough
- 12 Get involved
- 13 A Small World in Theatre History
- 15 Sponsor NVT
- 16 *Elektra* Review
- 18 NVT news
- 19 Contact us
- 20 Booking tickets

Forthcoming productions

The Approach

by Mark Rowe

directed by Mark Wilson

21 to 29 March 2025

Three women. Three chance-meeting conversations, their interwoven threads spread over five years during which the audience is drawn to listen as much to what is left unsaid as to what can be heard. It deals with betrayal, rage and the letting-go of rage, with loss and with longing. It is funny and it is achingly sad.

The Heresy of Love

by Helen Edmundson

directed by Gerry McCrudden

25 April to 3 May 2025

Inspired by Sister Juana Ines de la Cruz' extraordinary life, the play is full of intrigue and ambition. It is as funny as it is tragic; with a smattering of scheming servants, illicit desire and power politics. Sister Juana's has been a candidate for Catholic sainthood, a symbol of Mexican nationalism and women's rights. Making her a figure of controversy and debate to this day.

Ghosts

by Henrik Ibsen

directed by Jerry Lyne

23 to 31 May 2025

Helene Alving has spent her life suspended in an emotional void after the death of her cruel but outwardly charming husband. She is determined to escape the ghosts of her past by telling her son, Oswald the truth about his father. But on his return from his life as a painter in France, she finds that is not so straightforward. This brilliant adaptation by Richard Eyre, brings out the essence of Ibsen's play in 2 acts.

Forthcoming productions

Eurydice

by Sarah Ruhl

directed by Sam Chittenden

20 to 28 June 2025

Eurydice is in love with Orpheus. Her dead father has advice for her wedding but his letters can't get through to the land of the living. When at last one does, she falls into the underworld, her memory wiped. How will she ever get home?

Short Plays 2025

25 July to 2 August 2025

Auto-De-Fe

by Tennessee Williams

directed by Ayshen Irfan

Red Peppers

by Noël Coward

directed by Ashley Artus

The 15 Minute Hamlet

by Tom Stoppard

directed by Goldie Majtas

Fade to Black

By David Gillies

directed by Greg Donaldson

The Pen of my Aunt

by Gordon Daviot

directed by David Barnstorm

From Page to Stage: Exploring Directorial Philosophies at NVT

By Neil Hadley

“What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger”: Friedrich Nietzsche’s pronouncement applies to any director who has managed to get a performance on stage in a condition ready to be seen by an audience. This process, often referred to as “from page to stage” is the process I will be exploring in a series of articles where I hope to gain access to past and current directors from NVT and members of their cast. Robert Marsden introduced me to the idea of “rehearsal process polarities” in his book, *Inside the Rehearsal Room*. He suggests that there are five significant polarities which can be viewed as extremities on a scale; a series of attitudes and methods which a director can select at the beginning of the complex, challenging and rewarding process of staging a play.

Auteur Directorial Concepts

The polarity that I want to explore is that of “auteur directorial concepts” versus the “invisible director.” The first approach suggests a director has a firm and rigid idea of the final production from the very first stages. It may also suggest a somewhat authoritarian figure who has an all-encompassing vision that the actors must follow in order to fulfil the director’s ultimate goal. A director in this mould may also carry with them a sense of history and style from past productions: an imprint of methodologies which have been successful and therefore should be reproduced.

This style attracts or repels certain actors, who will have their own ideas on how a show should be directed, perhaps based on previous experiences. There is a broad range of theatrical experience at the NVT which includes members who alternate from directing productions to acting in them, and this particular group is very well placed to contribute to the hugely valuable discussion of directorial philosophy and methodology.



The Invisible Director

The opposite philosophy Marsden describes as the “invisible director.” This director sees themselves as a ‘director in a group’ rather than a ‘director of a group’. At the heart of this approach is the idea that the director has a framework with loose borders. These borders are flexible in order to allow the actors, at the very heart of the rehearsal process, to flesh out the space with the richness and complexity of their ideas, energy, intellect and built relationships. This melting-pot of creativity is one that Emma Rice, (creator and leader of Wise Children Theatre Company), values highly. She once described her approach as having two interlinked phases: ‘mining’ and ‘sculpting’. The ‘mining’ phase refers to her allowing actors time to independently explore a scene with the hope that autonomy will lead to fresh, innovative and original responses from the actors and with the dynamic fusion that comes from practical exploration.

The ‘sculpting’ phase involves the actors presenting their ideas, with Emma observing, note-taking and then using the raw material presented; shaping the scene to create the most vivid and visually exciting version. A director with this approach will still have a footprint in the rehearsal process, but at its heart, the idea is that scenographic ideas emerge from the actual text itself, rather than pre-conceived ideas.

In reality, the majority of directors lie somewhere between the two polarities and at different times during the audition/rehearsal/tech process borrow from a range of methods and practices/ Sometimes this based on instinct, and at other times comes from previously successful strategies.

Directorial approaches at NVT

The NVT is widely respected for producing plays of a very high standard. They range from classical to contemporary texts, embracing diverse cast sizes to allow for intimacy where required, but also as much opportunity for actors to perform. No discussion of the director’s role can escape the central demands of the paying audience, and the Artistic Team work extremely hard to ensuring that standards are met, both in terms of artistic merit and ticket sales. This keeps the theatre alive and thriving in a period of extreme financial difficulty.

Over the next few months, I hope to chat with directors and casts about their practical experiences of staging plays at the NVT. I plan to share accounts of these discussions in this newsletter, in the hope of encouraging a conversation on the nature of directing. These include members who have had the opportunity to shadow directors, to take the role of Assistant Director and eventually direct short and possibly full-length plays. This type of opportunity is crucial to the development of new directors and is actively encouraged by the Artistic Director. Other experienced directors also act as mentors in both official and unofficial capacities. I hope that this exchange of ideas will play a small part in contributing to the continued flourishing directorial culture of NVT.

Anyone who is interested in contributing to this conversation or sharing their work, you can contact me at hadleygrad@yahoo.co.uk.

Neil currently leads the Performing Arts department at Reigate Sixth Form College and is the Acting Class Co-Ordinator and Little Theatre Guild Representative for the NVT.



Information

BECOME AN NVT ANGEL

Join our community of Angels and play a vital role in supporting the growth and development of the New Venture Theatre. Whether you become an Angel, Fallen Angel, Archangel, or even an Archangel Gabriel, your generosity helps us maintain and improve our beloved theatre.

Our Angels have always been an incredible source of support—could you be next? For details, contact:

Gerry McCrudden

angels@newventure.org.uk

If you're a UK taxpayer, your donation could go even further with GiftAid.

MEMBERSHIP

Become a member of the New Venture Theatre for just £15 a year (£10 for students or those unwaged) and enjoy a host of benefits, including reduced ticket prices and opportunities to get involved behind the scenes.

Whether you're here to enjoy our incredible productions or want to dive into the action by volunteering, membership is the first step to being part of our vibrant community. Please note: all volunteers must be members.

Ready to join, renew, or check your membership details? Visit:

www.newventure.org.uk/join-us

ACTING CLASSES

Explore your creativity and build your skills at our drop-in acting classes, open to anyone 18+ - no experience required! Each session is led by experienced teachers and covers a wide range of topics, including acting techniques, text work, movement, comedy, and stage presence.

Our classes are a fantastic way to get involved in the theatre, learn about auditions and productions, and connect with the NVT community. Whether you're looking to perform or contribute in other ways, we'd love to see you there.

Mondays, 7:30pm - 9:30pm

Cost: £5 (NVT members: £2.50)

For more information about upcoming sessions, visit:

www.newventure.org.uk/actingclass

Spotlight on: Kasha Goodenough



Kasha joined NVT in 2015 attending the Monday Night Acting Classes before securing roles in productions such as: Blood Wedding, Lulu, Consent, Les Liaison Dangereuses, The Sweet Science of Bruising and Salome. She has also worked with several other independent theatre companies for Brighton Fringe over the years including a debut at Brighton Little Theatre in 2023 in Black Mountain.

What first inspired you to pursue acting, and how did your journey lead you to NVT?

As far back as I can remember, I was always putting on plays for my parents, directing my two younger brothers. But I think it all started with us kids playing in my Dad's band rehearsal room at home, where we mimed to The Beatles songs playing on all the instruments in the studio. Then in Junior and High School, I was in every school play and loved the social and fun element of it. When I left South Africa in 2003 to get work/life experience in London, the intention was to join an Am-Dram Society, but life took me on a different path. It's only when I moved to Brighton and attended the 10 Minute Play Competition at NVT in 2015 that I knew this is where I needed to be. I wanted to be on that stage; I could see myself on that stage. So, I joined the Monday Night Acting Classes at NVT and attended it religiously for two years to build my confidence and prepare for auditions.

What keeps you coming back to perform at NVT, and what do you think makes this theatre so special?

Since day one of joining NVT, I felt like I belonged here. I had just moved to Brighton and suddenly I gained a second home and a theatre family. I've been a member of NVT for nearly 10 years now and what I love about NVT is that anyone is welcome and encouraged to contribute and get involved, whether it be on stage or off. The longstanding NVT members are so passionate about their skills and love of NVT, it is quite infectious, and they are willing to teach newcomers the ropes to the magic of theatre. But also, I find that all roads lead to NVT in this industry in Brighton, and I have met and worked with award winning/experienced actors, writers and directors;

and the standard of the productions are just as good, if not better than the National Theatre. NVT is run by volunteers who are passionate about theatre. The word 'amateur' has always had negative connotations, implying poor productions or bad acting, but I find that to not be the case at NVT. The word 'amateur' comes from the Latin word 'amare' which means 'to love', and that is exactly what NVT is all about!

You've played a variety of roles at NVT – are there any that stand out as particularly challenging or meaningful to you and why?

Playing Anna Lamb in *The Sweet Science of Bruising* was very special. It was an absolute honour to be in that production and learning 'Lady Boxing', which was so much fun. The play is such a strong female empowerment story centred around four women of different backgrounds in Victorian London who take up boxing for various reasons. It was an incredibly emotional experience, as the story taps into all kinds of hardships a woman goes through (even to this day), and it was very hard letting go of Anna on the final night. I was overcome with tears with the final scenes on stage as I didn't want to stop telling her story. That one hit deep; I shall never forget that experience.

Playing Queen Herodias in *Salome* was very challenging, as there was a lot of physical dance movement to tell a story and portray emotions, and there was some singing involved too. It was a very stylised and visual production; unlike anything I have ever been involved in or seen at NVT. It really stretched me as an actor, and at times I doubted myself and the vision, but I committed to it. And honestly, I have never received such high praise of my performance on my NVT journey as I did on *Salome*. I was exhausted by the end of it all, but so glad I challenged myself in new ways as an actor.

How do you prepare for roles that are vastly different from one another? Are there specific techniques or processes you follow?

For me, it's important to read through the entire script to understand the story, and then read through the script again, focusing on just my character

to understand their individual story: Who are they? What is their motivation? What is their relationship with everyone? What are they thinking and feeling? Why do they say (or not say) the things they do? But also, I tap into my own well of personal experiences on scenarios or situations that a character may find themselves in, to be authentic and sincere in my portrayal.

Theatre relies on collaboration. Can you share an experience where the backstage crew or production team made a significant impact on a performance?

Before I got on stage at NVT, I just wanted to be part of the magic of theatre and whenever I didn't succeed in an audition, I volunteered to be part of the crew as either a stage manager, costume designer or production manager. What you learn through this process is how everyone is integral to a production. The world we inhabit as actors cannot be achieved without set designers, lighting and sound design crew to make an audience feel transported to Victorian London, for example. We as actors cannot feel fully realised as our characters if we are not wearing the right costumes/props that could alter how we move or make-up to make us other than ourselves. The backstage crew and production team are equally important as the actors for a successful production.

What would you say to someone considering joining NVT, whether as an actor, crew member, or volunteer?

Do it! Sign up. Join us. Get involved. Be part of the magic! Everyone is welcome.

Get involved

New Venture Theatre (NVT) is a 100% volunteer-run charity – no paid staff, just passionate people making theatre happen. That means we rely on dedicated volunteers to bring our productions to life.

Whether you love being on stage, behind the scenes, or front-of-house, we'd love to have you on board. Ready to jump in? Email our Volunteer Co-ordinator:

Alison McMillan-Puri – get-involved@newventure.org.uk

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

DIRECTING: Each season (October–July), experienced directors can pitch plays to stage at NVT. If you're new to directing, you can assist on a production to gain experience. Check our website from November to February for details.

ACTING: All productions hold open auditions. Anyone can try out, but if cast, you'll need to become a member. Auditions are announced via email and on our website.

PRODUCTION MANAGER: Work alongside the director to manage the admin side of a production and be responsible for coordinating meetings with the design team and managing the budget. The first step would be to shadow a production manager. This is a great way to work with a production from the outset to the production run.

STAGE MANAGEMENT: The Stage Manager keeps everything running smoothly, from rehearsals to live performances. They coordinate props, crew, and scene changes, often with help from Assistant Stage Managers (ASMs). We are always looking for ASM's and those with experience in Hair & Makeup or Costume.

SET CONSTRUCTION: Work with our set designers and builders to bring each production to life. Whether you're handy with tools, skilled at painting, or just eager to learn, there's a role for you.

BAR TEAM: Help serve drinks and snacks before the show, at intermission, and after performances. Our Front of House Manager will provide all the training you need, including how to use the till.

Ian Amos, our Box Office Manager, will be stepping at the end of this season. If you'd like to take on the role managing NVT's ticket sales and running the Box Office team, get in touch.

And that's just the start, there are many more ways to get involved.

FIND OUT MORE & UPDATE YOUR MEMBERSHIP DETAILS

New Member: Want to get involved? Visit www.newventure.org.uk (click 'Get Involved' at top of the homepage) and click "You can join online here"

Existing members can update membership details to let us know how you'd like to help using the "Membership Login" at the bottom of the homepage.

Let's make theatre happen—together.

A Small World in Theatre History

By Ian Black

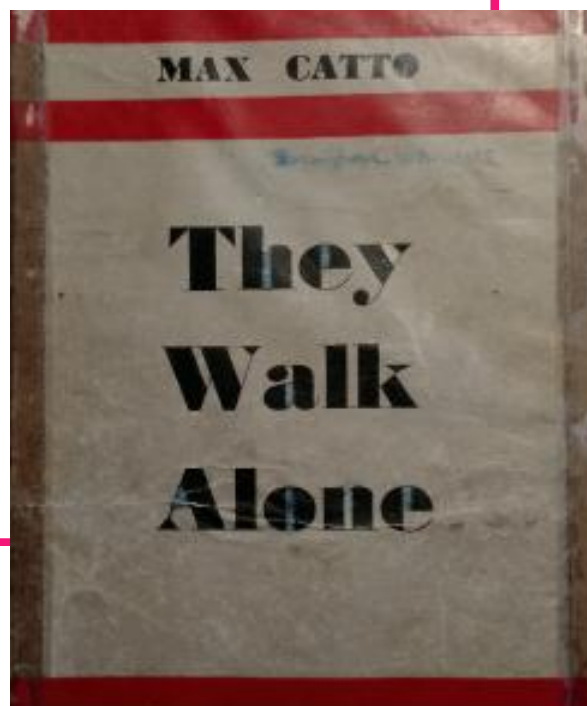
Theatre life is full of surprises, but some are more remarkable than others. Almost 10 years ago, I was stage managing *Caramba's Revenge* by William Norfolk at Lancing Parish Hall. During the get-out, an unexpected piece of Brighton's theatrical history surfaced in the most ordinary of places.

As we were clearing the last pieces of the set, someone noticed an unfamiliar book in the stage manager's area. It had appeared there during the run, but no one knew how it got there. It had nothing to do with the production. The book turned out to be an old copy of a script for *They Walk Alone* by Max Catto and what we found inside offered a fascinating glimpse into Brighton's theatrical past.

On the cover was a name: the script belonged to Brenda Sandell, with careful annotations for the role of Julie. Between its pages lay two treasures: a letter dated 27 December 1950, on New Venture Productions letterhead (the predecessor to today's New Venture Theatre), offering Brenda the role. Alongside it was a telegram from opening night – 23 February 1951 – sent from Oxford Street with good wishes from someone named Roma.

They Walk Alone is a 1938 thriller that tells the story of Emmy Baudine, a troubled young woman sent to work on a remote farm in England. Her arrival coincides with a series of mysterious and gruesome murders, weaving a macabre tale of suspense and dark secrets.

The serendipitous discovery of Brenda Sandell's annotated script for *They Walk Alone* seems almost fitting for a play steeped in mystery and eerie coincidences. Just as the plot unravels through unexpected connections and hidden truths, the appearance of this forgotten piece of theatrical history in an unlikely place ties the past to the present, reminding us of the surprising ways stories – and memories – can resurface.



I was the only person there with ties to the New Venture Theatre, and it felt like more than coincidence that I happened to be stage managing that show and was there when this artefact was discovered. If I hadn't been there, this remarkable piece of history might have been discarded or overlooked. Instead, I was able to rescue the script, the letter, and the telegram and return them to the New Venture Theatre.

This serendipitous experience was a powerful reminder of how theatre's past and present are always intertwined. The NVT is a theatre with rich history, and many unknown stories of director, actors, thespians, alike who have contributed to this vivid community. What might have seemed like a forgotten artefact turned out to be a precious link to Brighton's theatrical history, now preserved and appreciated once again.

Ian Black is the chairperson of the New Venture Theatre.

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NEW VENTURE PRODUCTIONS
(THE BRIGHTON & HOVE REPERTORY COMPANY)
ALL CORRESPONDENCE
27, KIMFORD ROAD,
BRIGHTON BN1 4JF

27-12-50

Dear Brenda,

Would you play "Julius Sallust" in the united play "They Walk Alone"? The first rehearsal was on Sunday Jan 7th at this address 30m 1st floor. Then three nights a week central the show on Sat 25-28-1951. I will not disappoint you a second time and as you will get a chance to get into the skin of the part. If you can play do not trouble to answer as I shall know all is well, but if you cannot play would you let me hear the play back as soon as possible please.

We hope you've had a happy Christmas and may I now wish you a very Happy New Year.

Yours sincerely,
John

WHY NOT SPONSOR NVT?

LOCAL BUSINESSES – GET YOUR NAME IN THE SPOTLIGHT!

Looking for a unique way to connect with the Brighton & Hove community? Become a sponsor of New Venture Theatre (NVT) and support a thriving local arts hub while boosting your business's visibility. For just **£300 (covering two years)**, you'll enjoy a range of benefits that put your business in front of theatre lovers across the city.

The five star benefits for the sponsor are:

- Including your business name and details in all production programmes (usually 10 productions a year) each with a run of 8 shows and audience numbers generally ranging from 45 to 60 for each show.
- The business name, including the logo, appears as a named sponsor on the landing page of our [website](#).
- The business name, including the logo, appears in the regular NVT email updates – 10 per annum sent, by email or post, to 320 + members.
- The business name, including the logo, appears in periodic NVT Newsletters.
- Two tickets per production available to your business on request with a current NVT non-member face value of £480.

If you are interested in finding out more about how to sponsor NVT please email finance@newventure.org.uk

Minimalist Staging, Maximum Impact: A Fresh Look at *Elektra*

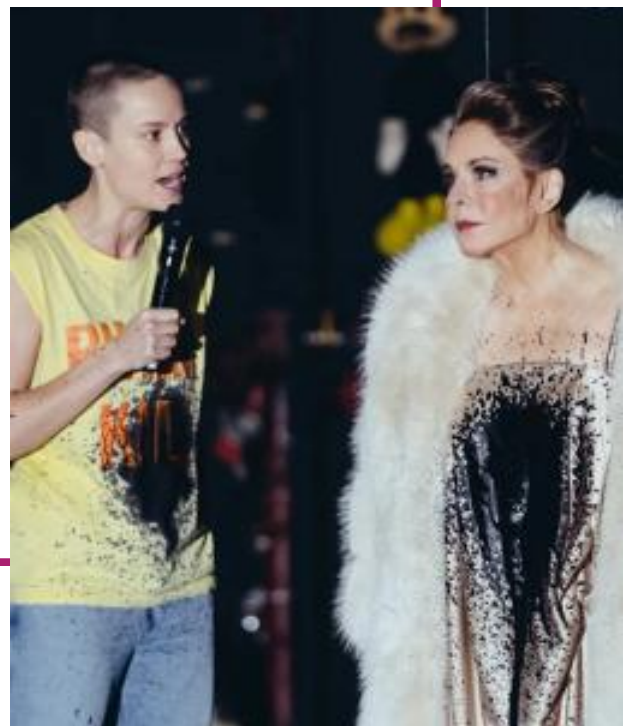
By Richard Andrews

We climbed to the balcony and caught sight of the stage looking stark but curiously inviting, ready for a modern production of *Elektra* at the Theatre Royal Brighton; a bare wall at the back of the stage, with chairs and tripods dotted in a circle in the middle of the stage. How would the scenery evolve? What significance can I place on those few items? The brick wall hinted at a raw *West Side Story* vibe: Okay, I'm interested.

Split my eardrums with a party cracker, what the heck is that pummelling us with a massive and consistent note through a microphone? Shorn head, t-shirt, jeans and trainers, enter Brie Larson, who I now know to be an accomplished pop singer as well as an actress. What a start with such a power-packed voice.

That force continued at pace, so I quickly tuned into the fact that only Brie had a microphone, while the other performers were using their natural voices. I thoroughly appreciated the grief cursing through the character, which was complemented by her "take no shit" attitude and dress sense that bolstered the image. If the production seemed bare, the ensemble brought me a platter of colourful song which slid down my ears like all the best flavoured ice-cream: smooth and encapsulating. Storyline, musicality and intensity, I loved the way they synchronised and drew a spotlight on words and dialogue.

My senses pricked up and I became even keener to watch when the stage began to rotate. The movement didn't distract but kept me hooked to see what other subtle changes might happen. Had I seen that, did I notice that before, I asked myself... Ink seemed to lie and move across the costume fronts like slashes, and then it became clear that the three tripods had delivered those additional scars, quietly and secretly spurting dark danger on to their crisp cream costumes.



Onto the sound: There was a fierce and sinister alternative microphone that was used by Sam, who's setup had distorting effects, to bring further depth to thoughts and pain via space *de-brie*. It felt like the scattered pieces of a broken mind and heart, so whilst that hurt the ears, I understood the sentiment later in the play, but felt it could easily have split the diverse audience. When considering substance over form, I left with mixed feelings about the distorted effects.

The intensity of the whole production was high throughout, and the staged simplicity brought out the characters in all their glory, leaving you to focus on delivery of these angsty classic characters. Larson delivered a gripping and competent emotional performance. As a novice to the full story, I found the adaptation proved clear and easy to follow with the fundamental principles war, murder, revenge, power and love delivering a rollercoaster of emotions, favourably sprinkled with some beautiful quality singing, mesmeric.

Fit for today's society, poignant and very relevant for everyone, especially in the acknowledgement of loss and its far-reaching effect. Reflect on the relevance but try to see this if you can.

Elektra is a classic Greek tragedy adapted to bring a contemporary twist to the ancient Sophocles' text, was Directed by Daniel Fish & adapted by Anne Carson.

Richard currently works in the Radiology & Projects team at Sussex MSK Health, and is a regular attendee of NVT's Monday night acting class.



NVT news

REMEMBERING FRED PARTRIDGE

Thanks to a generous donation from Trevor Harvey, the New Venture Theatre is proud to commemorate Fred Partridge by naming a seat in his honour. Fred Partridge, who passed away two years ago at the remarkable age of 101, was a cherished member of the NVT community. He regularly attended the Sussex Playwrights' Club at NVT from the early 1970s until around 2014, where many of his plays were first read, including his own translations of international works. Over the decades, Fred became a familiar face at NVT productions. In 1979, during our 21st Anniversary year, his play, *The Engagement*, was staged as part of our celebrations.

His talents extended far beyond the local stage – Fred's plays, including his adaptation of Tolstoy's *Master and Man*, were featured on BBC Radio 4's Afternoon Drama slot and broadcast internationally in Germany, Holland, South Africa, and Australia. Several of Fred's scripts were published for performance by amateur dramatic groups and repertory companies, with one of his plays, *A Sweet Emotion*, forming the centrepiece of an Anglia TV Arts programme after its professional production. Before settling in Brighton, Fred was an active member of Progress Theatre in Reading, where he served as manager and saw four of his French play translations staged. In addition to his creative accomplishments, Fred was an accountant by profession, a full-time member of The Writers' Guild of Great Britain, and a former Chairman of their Associates Branch.

We are thrilled to honour Fred Partridge's legacy and contributions to the world of theatre with this dedicated seat at NVT. His work, both here and beyond, has left an indelible mark on the arts, and we are grateful to keep his memory alive within our community.

OTHER NEWS

- Looking after our Grade II listed building is essential to keeping NVT a thriving community space. In November, we completed major roofing work at the rear of the theatre, costing over £16,000. More repairs are planned for the front of the building this summer to ensure it remains in great shape for years to come.

Contact us

The New Venture Theatre
Bedford Place, Brighton BN1 2PT

Box Office Info: 01273 746118
 (answerphone only)
boxoffice@newventure.org.uk

General Enquiries: 01273 808353
 (answerphone only)
info@newventure.org.uk

Instagram:

[@brightonnewventuretheatre](https://www.instagram.com/brightonnewventuretheatre)

Facebook:

[@NewVentureTheatreBrighton](https://www.facebook.com/NewVentureTheatreBrighton)

X (formerly Twitter): [@nvt_brighton](https://twitter.com/nvt_brighton)

Chairman - Ian Black*
chairman@newventure.org.uk

Secretary - Jerry Lyne*
secretary@newventure.org.uk

Artistic Director - Katie Brownings*
art.dir@newventure.org.uk

Treasurer - Alison McMillan-Puri*
finance@newventure.org.uk

Production Coordinator - VACANT

Buildings Manager - Peter Meekings*
buildings@newventure.org.uk

Front of House Coordinator - VACANT

Company Stage Manager - VACANT
CSM@newventure.org.uk

Box Office Manager - Ian Amos
boxoffice@newventure.org.uk

Volunteer Coordinator - Alison McMillan-Puri*
volunteering@newventure.org.uk

Technical Coordinator - VACANT

Membership Secretary - Tandy Cufley
membership@newventure.org.uk

Newsletter Editor - Annabel Fenton

Props Coordinator - Guy Dixon
props@newventure.org.uk

Little Theatre Guild Rep - Neil Hadley*
actingclass@newventure.org.uk

Child Protection Officer - Pat Boxall
pat.boxall@newventure.org.uk

Social Events Manager - Mary Weaver
social@newventure.org.uk

Angels - Gerry McCrudden
angels@newventure.org.uk

Archives - Gerry McCrudden
archive@newventure.org.uk

Acting Class Coordinator - Neil Hadley*
actingclass@newventure.org.uk

Publicity & Marketing - Elysa Hyde
publicity@newventure.org.uk

**Asterisks indicate trustee committee members*

BOOKING TICKETS

TICKET PRICES AND PERFORMANCES

Members £10 / Non-Members £12

Evening performances are at 7:30pm

Sundays are matinees only at 2:30pm

There are no performances on Mondays

HOW TO BOOK TICKETS

You can book online at
www.newventure.org.uk

CONTACTING BOX OFFICE

Answerphone only: 01273 746118

For all ticketing enquiries, email:
boxoffice@newventure.org.uk

STUDIO THEATRE SEATING AND ACCESS The Studio has unallocated seating. There is one step at the entrance; a temporary ramp is available.

THEATRE UPSTAIRS SEATING AND ACCESS The Theatre Upstairs has allocated seating. Access is only possible by 4 flights of stairs and therefore may not be suitable for those with limited mobility.

