

SPRING / SUMMER 2026

NVT NEWSLETTER

Behind the Curtain

**“THEY
THOUGHT OF
HELEN AS A
WOMAN...BUT
SHE WAS A
WEAPON.”**

**STRAT MASTORIS’ DEBUT PLAY W.M.D.
TRANSFORMS HELEN OF TROY INTO
HISTORY’S FIRST POLITICAL OPERATIVE...
AND ASKS WHETHER ANYTHING HAS
REALLY CHANGED SINCE.**

**COMMUNITY, COURAGE,
AND CONVERSATION:**

**HOW THE AGM SPARKED CHANGE
ACROSS NVT, A TURNING POINT FOR
OUR THEATRE COMMUNITY.**



Editor's Note

Hello!

I'm Ayshen Irfan, the new editor of Behind the Curtain and also your new Secretary, as appointed at the AGM. It's an absolute pleasure to take on both roles and share this exciting journey with you all.

What a season it's already been! From our Christmas musical Pickwick and Weller, written by BAFTA-award winning Barry Purchase, which was so popular it had a waiting list of over 100 people... to the fantastic AGM at the Old Ship Hotel, where we saw a wonderful turnout and, for the first time in years, have a fully filled committee. We've welcomed new faces, new writers, and new members into our community, and it's been an honour to watch it all come together.

We've enjoyed everything from Fish and Chips quizzes to spooky ghost stories, and of course, the glitzy New Year's Ball! These are the moments that capture the spirit of Behind the Curtain, celebrating not only the incredible work that takes place on stage but also the brilliant people who make everything possible behind the scenes.

As we step into the new year, with the pitches for directors just closed, we can all look forward to the new creative ventures ahead. I'm sure there are some truly inspiring ideas and passionate projects on the horizon that will keep us all excited.

Thank you for being a part of this community, and I can't wait to see what we all achieve together in the months to come!

Warmly yours,

Ayshen Irfan

Newsletter Editor & Secretary





GHOSTS

by HENRIK IBSEN

a version by Richard Eyre

directed by Jerry Lyne

<https://stratmastorisphotography.com/>

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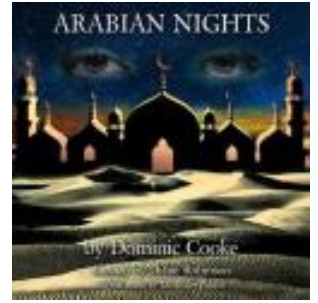
Upcoming Productions

Arabian Nights

Written by Dominic Cooke | Directed by Diane Robinson

20th - 28th March

We've all heard the name – 'Arabian nights,' but how many of us actually know that it is in fact a collection of stories from the Middle East, bound together by the bridge story of Shahrazad who tells the stories to save her life and the life of other young women. This production is about the beauty and art of storytelling. It is about the universality of stories and how important it is to us, as humans, to keep telling them.



Playhouse Creatures

Written by April De Angelis | Directed by Gaby Bowring

17th - 25th April

It's 1669, and the London elite are enjoying the latest 'novelty' in English theatre: the Actress. Playhouse Creatures follows the precarious lives of these first female players, as they discover the consequences of their arrival upon the professional stage.

Amid lively backstage antics - and fierce rivalries - they each revel in a newfound financial independence, whilst contending with both sexual exploitation and empowerment, onstage and off.

Told with warmth and wit, this moving play rejoices in the camaraderie of these Restoration actresses, embracing both the comic and the tragic in their bold pursuit of personal and creative freedom.



Murder, Margaret, and Me

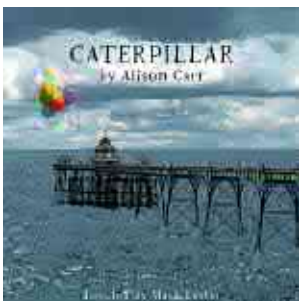
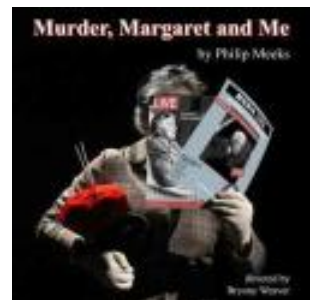
Written by Philip Meeks | Directed by Bryony Weaver

15th - 23rd May

In 1960, world-famous crime writer Agatha Christie sold the rights to a number of her books to MGM, who decided to make a few of the Miss Marple titles into films. When they approached character actress Margaret Rutherford to take the role, she at first refused, citing murder as 'a sordid business', but was later encouraged to accept.

Christie wasn't happy: Rutherford was nothing like her image of her lady sleuth. But in later years, she dedicated her book *The Mirror Crack'd From Side to Side* to Rutherford. What made her change her mind?

Comic thriller *Murder, Margaret and Me* is set in Elstree film studios, and imagines the conversations the two women may have had. As things progress, Christie realises that Rutherford is not all she appears to be – she has a deep secret which she wants to keep hidden. And Christie is determined to find out what it is.



Caterpillar

Written by Alison Carr | Directed by Mark Lester

19th - 27th June

Simon hasn't got Claire's email that is cancelling his booking. Due to family illness, the B'n'B is closed for the foreseeable future. He is not to be put off though, as he has a promise to fulfil. Claire reneges and lets him in for the night. In the morning, we meet Maeve who runs the B'n'B, and is Claire's mum. Claire is helping out after Maeve's stroke. As time goes on, we learn that all three of them have a secret. Described as a "darkly funny, searing and tender drama", the protagonists attempt to deal with the cards life has dealt them.



Appropriate

Written by Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins | Directed by Claire Lewis

17th - 25th July

When the Lafayette siblings return to their late father's crumbling Arkansas plantation home to settle his estate, tensions explode as they uncover disturbing artefacts among his belongings. *Appropriate* is a bold, biting and darkly comic play that explores legacy, race and what we choose to remember – or forget – about our past.



Jerusalem
by Jez Butterworth
directed by David Villiers
<https://stratmastorisphotography.com/>

Q&A

WITH ALISON CARR

Gateshead-born writer Alison Carr has built a reputation for theatre that is funny, tender and unflinching. Her work has been staged by the National Theatre and Live Theatre, and her short film *Doppelganger* is currently available to watch on BBC iPlayer:

In June, Brighton audiences can experience her play *Caterpillar* at the New Venture Theatre.



Q

Caterpillar opens with a woman contemplating a leap — both literal and metaphorical. What drew you to begin the play at that edge-of-change moment?

The spark of the idea for *Caterpillar* came from a story I heard on the radio from a woman who was involved in one of these ‘Birdman’ festivals. She recounted being under the water in a white dress billowing around her. In the earliest drafts, the play started with Claire being under the water. But as the story unfolded and developed, I changed it to a moment of suspension just after stepping off the pier. Elongating what would, in reality, be a split second. The play is about change, is about deciding to step off or not, so starting with this impossible moment of pause, of quiet and space, felt important for the maelstrom of what’s to come.

Q

There’s a delicate balance in the play between dark humour and something much more tender and raw. How conscious are you of that balance when you’re writing?

At this point, that is just baked in to how I think and write. I always say an audience will come with you to a much darker place if they’re laughing along the way. People are funny, even in their darkest moments, and particularly with the characters of Claire and Maeve they use humour as a weapon and as defence.



Caterpillar is set in a faded seaside town. How important was that sense of place to you when you were writing the play?

With the Birdman festival at the centre of the play, it had to be set somewhere coastal. I live in the North East, so I know those seaside towns which feel like they've seen better days but still have loads of character. I was interested in that contrast between a town that's a bit worn down and this burst of energy when the festival descends. For one weekend, everything feels heightened and alive, and then it all disappears again. That sense of place feeds directly into the themes of the play, of longing, escape, and the idea of transformation.



Your work often centres on complex, funny, contradictory women. What keeps drawing you back to those characters?

Again, it's baked in at this point. These are the characters I am interested in writing. I think Claire is one of my most unlikable (quote unquote) characters, but what really interests me is why she behaves the way she does. No one is all good, or all bad, but I think often female characters are not 'allowed' to behave in challenging or contradictory ways. I want to be part of changing that, of writing richer, layered leading roles for the wealth of talented female actors out there.



Has your relationship to the play changed since you first wrote it?

It must be ten years or thereabouts since I wrote the play, and when it was first produced at Theatre503 in 2018 I was right on top of it, in rehearsals, tweaking it, answering questions, etc. Now there's a lot more distance between me and it, which I actually really value. It's out there in the world, belonging to the people making it and the audiences watching it. I love when I see a play of mine with other interpretations or instincts brought to it, and sometimes finding something I didn't even know was there. That's always exciting.



Alongside your career as a writer for stage, screen and audio, you've kept strong ties to community theatre, including Newcastle's People's Theatre. What does that world give you — creatively or personally — that feels different from the professional sphere?

As someone who works in theatre professionally, the People's is a bit of a busman's holiday! But I just love theatre, and being part of it in lots of different forms. More often than not I am able to leave my 'writer hat' at home when I'm in rehearsals as an actor, so it allows me to be creative in a different way. It also gives me insight into what it's like being a performer - of practicalities, of learning lines, of being on a stage, etc. There is so much talent and ambition at the People's, as I know there is in community theatres across the country, that often I think the only difference between professional and non-professional theatre is money and time.

Q

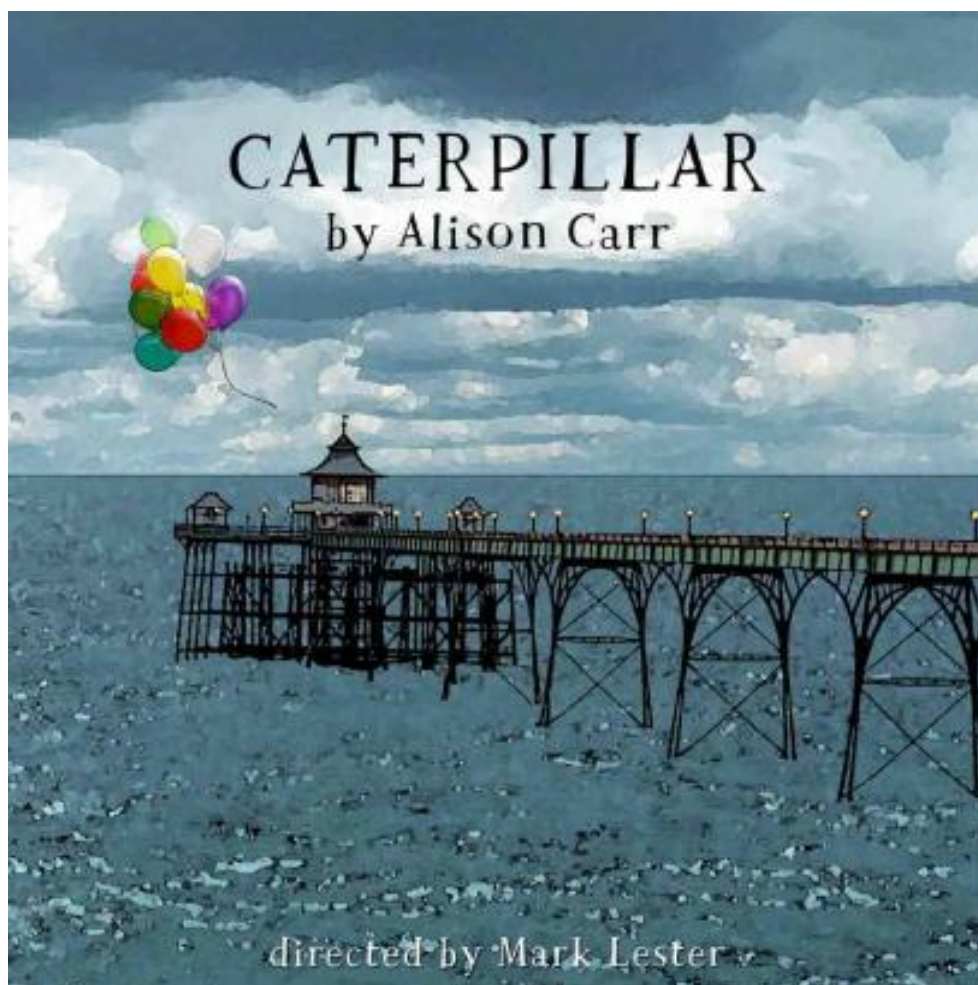
You're coming down to Brighton to watch our production of *Caterpillar* in June. Are you looking forward to anything in particular while you're here?

I've never been to Brighton before, so I'm excited to be a tourist and visit the beach and the Pier and the Pavillion, as well as explore the town. I hope the weather's good when I'm there. But, of course, I'm most looking forward to visiting NVT and seeing the play ...!

Q

What do you hope NVT audiences sit with on the journey home after watching *Caterpillar*?

I hope they feel they had a good night at the theatre.



***Caterpillar* runs from 19th to 27th June 2026 in the Studio, and is directed by Mark Lester.**

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

The AGM

Celebrating Change and Our Community

The Annual General Meeting was more than just a tick-box meeting, it was a powerful demonstration of how deeply people care about the NVT and the community it fosters. From heartfelt speeches to passionate advocacy for the theatre's activities, it became crystal clear just how much NVT means to its members.

It was a turning point for NVT. The AGM didn't just celebrate the theatre's successes but also shone a light on areas that need work. It was a moment of reckoning, showing us exactly where we stand and what needs to change to move forward. But, most importantly, it revealed how much strength there is in the community.

What stood out was the sheer volume of support: a record-breaking 149 people gathered at The Old Ship Hotel (where, amusingly, we were mistaken for New Adventure Theatre!).

However, it wasn't just about showing up. It was about speaking up. Volunteers, not all of whom are seasoned actors, took to the stage and shared their love for NVT with unmatched enthusiasm. It was clear that this is a community that will work tirelessly for the things they care about.

What really shone through at the AGM was the remarkable dedication of those involved with NVT, no matter where that involvement manifests. Every single person involved at NVT gives their time and energy simply because they love what we do here. I'd say that's a pretty beautiful thing. One of the most powerful takeaways from the AGM was the recognition of just how much we rely on those involved with the many processes. Without all of them, NVT wouldn't exist.

For those who are newer to NVT, it's worth explaining how the company is managed. As a registered charity, we are run entirely by volunteers, with a committee of Trustees elected annually by the



membership. From putting on ten productions year to running fundraising events, acting classes, and play readings, there are countless ways to get involved and learn new skills. Whether you're interested in acting, tech, or helping behind the scenes, there's a place for you in our vibrant and growing theatre community. At the heart of NVT are the volunteers who make it all happen.

The AGM also reminded us of the power of connection. For many, it was the first time they'd seen each other in person since before the pandemic. Catching up, sharing stories, and simply enjoying being around like-minded people was one of the best parts of the evening. However, this wasn't just about nostalgia. The AGM reminded us that there's still a lot to be done. We need to find ways to stay connected, keep communication flowing, and build a more inclusive environment where everyone's voice matters.

The AGM was also a great lesson in the value of listening. It showed us how essential it is to hear from all corners of the community, whether that's in the form of suggestions, concerns, or ideas. Effective communication is key to keeping our theatre not just alive, but thriving. The AGM helped us identify areas where we can improve and grow, so we can better meet the needs of our members and audience.

We learned that NVT hasn't always been the best at listening to the needs of its members or acting on feedback. There were valid concerns raised, and whilst we've made great strides in recent years, it's clear that we need to do better when it comes to involving everyone in the process. Equally, we can only act within our limitations, and one way we can make clear where those limitations and rationales lie is through communication.

**“At the heart
of NVT are the
volunteers
who make it
all happen.”**

A huge achievement for this year's AGM was the election of a full committee. Ten trustees were elected, with all positions now filled in the wider roles of the theatre. This is the first time in years that we've had a full committee and wider team in place, and it's a massive step forward for NVT. With a strong leadership team in place, we're ready to take the next steps as we move closer to the theatre's 80th year. This is democracy in action. Members came together, voted, and helped shape the future of NVT.

As we move forward, it's clear that NVT should be in a constant state of growth and change. Change can be intimidating, especially with a milestone like an 80th birthday looming on the horizon. But it's also essential. To continue thriving and adapting to the times, we must remain open to new ideas and ways of doing things. The AGM reminded us of how far we've needed to come in adapting, and how far we can go if we keep listening, evolving, and embracing the changes ahead.

At the end of the day, the AGM revealed something truly beautiful: a theatre community that's vibrant, diverse, and passionate. Each voice, each idea, and each action has woven a richer and more colourful tapestry of what NVT is today. It's a reminder of how important our work is, not just on stage, but off it too. Let's continue to grow, learn, and make NVT the best it can be.

Masks, Music & Midnight Magic

Ringling in the New Year, NVT-style

Some welcomed the New Year at home, others on the dancefloor... and some rang it in at NVT, masked, merry and surrounded by theatre magic.

Our New Year's Eve Masked Ball was lovingly planned by Sabrina Giles and Tamsin Mastoris, two familiar and much-loved faces around the theatre. The time, care, and creativity they poured into the evening were felt in every detail, making it a special way to see out the year.

A huge thank you must go out to everyone who helped make the night happen, from the brilliant tech team to bar staff, all of whom generously gave up portions of their NYE to volunteer right through until 1am. And of course, heartfelt thanks to the fabulous entertainers who pulled out all the stops and kept the night lively!

The entertainment was MC'd by the ever-charming Gerry McCrudden, guiding us through a rich and varied programme. Highlights included Jo Salter's vintage, seductive vocals, delivering show tunes with effortless style, and Jozede and Daniel, whose accordion-accompanied songs brought a wonderfully European flair to the studio. Add to that a line-up of excellent stand-up comedians and sketches, injecting joy and laughter into the beautiful and bizarre shows.

One of the most powerful and poignant moments of the night, and one many of us will carry into the year ahead, came at midnight. Dressed in full Regency raiment, Laura Scobie led Auld Lang Syne with presence and power. As the clock struck twelve, strangers embraced, friends held tight, and the studio fell into a reverent hush. With arms linked, voices echoed her song and smiles and tears

were shared. It was a moment of togetherness, marking the turning of the year amongst friends and strangers, united under Laura's song.

And, of course, it would go amiss to not mention the masks! Charly Sommers, director of January's production 4000 Days, took home the award of best mask with her homemade black-and-pink pom-pom creation... affectionately dubbed the "alien sea anemone" by some (see image below). The craftsmanship alone was enough to wow us all. But we couldn't at least mention the brilliantly bizarre and ingenious masks by Carrie and Duncan, who arrived dressed as each other!

A joyful, generous, and unforgettable way to welcome the New Year. Here's to more moments like this in 2026.



LOCAL BUSINESS

Why not sponsor the New Venture Theatre?

As a valued community resource, NVT is always keen to work with relevant businesses based in Brighton and Hove who may wish to sponsor the theatre.

Our sponsorship arrangements are designed to be of mutual benefit to both NVT and our sponsors.

Cost: £300 for a two-year term

FIVE-STAR BENEFITS FOR SPONSORS INCLUDE:

- ★ Inclusion of your business name and details in all production programmes. NVT typically stages around 10 sell-out productions per year, each running for 8 performances.
- ★ Your business name and logo featured as a named sponsor on the landing page of our website
- ★ Your business name and logo included in regular NVT email updates, sent approximately 10 times per year to 500+ members by email or post.
- ★ Your business name and logo featured in periodic NVT newsletters.
- ★ Two complimentary tickets per production, available to your business on request, with a current non-member face value of £480.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT
SPONSORING NEW VENTURE THEATRE, PLEASE
EMAIL

FINANCE@NEWVENTURE.ORG.UK



New Writers

By Helen Gregory

Sitting in the audience as the ‘curtain’ went up on our short plays was, for many of us in the NVT writers’ group, a new and hugely rewarding experience. Our Short Play Evening, which ran on three sold-out nights in the Studio last October, featured eight 15-minute plays, ranging from a monologue about an actor from a violent film who loses the plot, to a four-hander about a family in the 1980s searching for meaning through grief.

Our first opportunity to see our work off the page had come a few months before, during a rehearsed reading evening at the theatre, when six of our short plays or excerpts from longer pieces were read by members of the acting class. It was a useful exercise, particularly as audience members were given the chance to offer written feedback, but we were keen to take the concept further so, with the help of artistic director Katie Brownings, we organised the NVT New Writers’ Short Play Evening.

It was designed to be a collaborative process between writer, actors, and director, offering insight into how a play is staged, from first reading to opening night. Katie first allocated each play a director (who all had varying amounts of experience) at random in a bid to make the process fair. These directors cast the plays themselves, mostly from NVT’s acting group, and either met or spoke to their writer before rehearsals, most of whom got a chance to attend at least one rehearsal to see how the process worked. It was a tight turnaround due to the constraints of the theatre diary and actors’ and directors’ availability, meaning that most plays only had about five or six rehearsals.

Many of us hadn't had the opportunity to see our work performed before while for some of the actors it was their first time in an NVT show. This introduction to stagecraft was invaluable: a chance to witness how actors interpreted our words and developed characters, to see how changes in direction and actors' interpretations during rehearsal could change the tone of our work, and then how these lines landed with an audience.

One writer commented: "Watching them develop their characters and seeing the directing process was illuminating, as was seeing the tech rehearsal to get a feeling for the mechanics and what's practical in a short piece. It will make me consider audio and staging in the next play I write."

The event was deemed a resounding success; the audience loved it, the actors enjoyed taking part, the directors were positive, there was a great buzz to every evening and a packed bar every night.

For the writers, it was a real learning curve that also provided an insight into the theatrical process and helped to build confidence. While some were concerned about directors making changes to their script, and others wished they could have been more involved, having our plays staged in front of an audience and gaining an understanding of the rehearsal process was invaluable.

A thorough debrief after the event gave both writers and directors the chance to feed back about what worked and what didn't. We now appreciate the importance of consistent script formatting, particularly for the hard-working technical team, and using even more minimal stage furniture in future to enable a more seamless transition between plays and make the stage managers' lives easier.

The group is looking forward to being able to stage a similar event sometime soon when there may be more tech runs and fewer but longer plays.

In the meantime, we continue to write, working on monologues, short plays and full-length plays, and reading them together at our monthly meetings. These make a solitary endeavour much more sociable and collaborative.

The group has now been running in its current format since May 2024, and we've gained some new members over the last 18 months, all with different backgrounds and writing experience. It's a friendly and informal space where we support each other, share our work, suggest ideas for plot and character development, and get updates on writing competitions.

Anyone who is interested in joining is welcome to come along to our meetings – you just need to be an NVT member.

For more details, contact helengwriter@gmail.com

NVT Fundraisers:

Good Food, Great Stories, & a Bit of Friendly Competition

We've had some wonderful social and fundraising events this season, kicking off in October with our ever-popular Fish & Quiz Night. A firm favourite with our audiences, it brings together the unbeatable combination of good food, friendly competition, and plenty of laughs.

The highlight of the night, of course, is the classic fish and chips (always a hit... with vegan options too!) and the lively quiz that follows. It's a fantastic opportunity for people of all ages to come together, enjoy a fun and relaxed atmosphere, and test their knowledge on a range of quirky trivia questions.

What makes it so special is that it's not just about the trivia (though there are always a few questions that keep everyone on their toes!), but more about the sense of community.

Mary Weaver, NVT's Social Secretary and the mastermind behind the Fish & Quiz Night, shared how it all began:

"We started these as an experiment a year ago (March 2025), and they have proved so popular that we are now doing them every quarter or so.

I had the idea after I attended a talk at a local church where they served a fish 'n' chips supper.

Initially, we thought they may prove problematic: people not keen, cold fish 'n' chips, how to supply ketchup and mayonnaise whilst adhering to health and safety guidelines (in sealed sachets was the answer) and more trouble than they were worth.

But now, dare I say it, we have it down to a fine art, and they are a great little fundraiser. We sell plenty of raffle tickets, make a profit on the food, and the bar does very well too."

The event welcomes 40 ticket-holders from 7pm, with teams arranged into groups of four to keep things fair, and sociable! Even those who arrive solo or in odd numbers often leave having made new friends.

The quiz itself, lovingly compiled by Artistic Director Katie Brownings and her partner Mike, starts at 7.30pm. Fish and chips from local favourite Bankers arrive at 8.30pm (just in time for the picture round), before the final questions and answers roll on until around 10.15pm. Winners receive small prizes... but, as Mary puts it, "the real prize is the glory of winning."

Best of all, people who once thought quizzes weren't for them are now the first to book tickets for the next one.

Another highlight of the spooky season at NVT was the special Halloween night, an immersive evening of eerie tales and atmospheric storytelling. It was all about coming together to share classic ghostly legends and spine-tingling anecdotes to get everyone in the Halloween spirit.

The focus here was on imagination, theatre, and celebrating the timeless tradition of telling tales around the fire (or the stage!) that make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up.

The next Fish & Quiz Night will take place on 13th March, with many more social and fundraising events popping up throughout the year, alongside the ten productions we proudly stage annually.

Keep an eye out, grab a ticket, and come and join the fun!





Pickwick & Weller

by Barry Purchase

with more than a nod towards Charles Dickens

Music composed by Michael James

Directed by Rod Lewis

<https://stratmastorisphotography.com/>



Katie Brownings'

AD Report

Something those embedded at NVT know is just how lucky we are to have Katie Brownings as our Artistic Director.

Katie's commitment to the theatre is constant and wholehearted. Season after season, she curates programmes that are thoughtful, ambitious, and richly varied, offering audiences work that is complex, nuanced—and always engaging. A passionate champion of female directors, her artistic vision continues to broaden perspectives and strengthen the diversity of voices on our stage.



Behind the scenes, Katie works tirelessly, devoting extraordinary amounts of time and care to every aspect of the theatre's creative life. And this year, she added yet another string to her bow, returning to the NVT stage herself with a powerful performance as Carol in Peter Quilter's *4000 Days*, directed by Charly Sommers.

What follows is Katie's Artistic Director's report, as presented at the AGM—a snapshot of a year shaped by creativity, collaboration, and an unwavering belief in what this theatre can be.



“When I think back to last season, I am pleased to say that we have continued the trend of selling out. Audiences continue to realise that they need to buy a ticket early because it is generally accepted that the plays are going to be of a high standard.

“The season started in October with *Salome*, directed by Natasha Higdon. This was an unusual production for us and provoked a “Marmite” reaction. However, I know that Natasha welcomed the feedback she received. I heard a whole range of reactions from the worst to someone telling me that they had decided to join because they loved it so much and thought it was one of the best things they had seen! If we want a dramatic piece to encourage reflection, discussion, aesthetic appreciation, empathy, awareness and an emotional response then *Salome* surely fulfilled this brief.

“*Mixie*, directed by Rod Lewis in November, explored the topsy-turvy life of *The Bicks* and was played in the studio space. This was another play which caused a lot of discussion and thought and gave another opportunity for some movement-only roles. Following on in December we saw the dark comedy *Rules for Living* directed by Martin Malone, which explored what happens when a family follows their own individual rules when gathered for a traditional Christmas.

“In the new year Steven O’Shea directed his own highly successful, paired-down version of *Macbeth*, with the witches used in inventive ways, playing various roles. This was followed in February by inviting the audience into *The Incident Room*, directed by Richard Lindfield, to watch the pressure mounting as police attempt to catch *The Yorkshire Ripper*.

“March brought us the funny and achingly sad three-hander, and my personal favourite of the season, *The Approach*, directed by Mark Wilson. I have been told that this was “more of a play for women”, which I can understand but I would urge anyone to go back and read the script, which has beautiful twists and deals with the universal topics of rage, betrayal, loss and longing. It required the audience to listen to what was said but even more perhaps to what was left unsaid.

“Gerry McCrudden chose to direct the largest cast of the season with *Heresy of Love*.

“In this play, set in the 1600’s in a convent in Mexico, a gifted and progressive writer finds herself at the centre of a battle of ideas when the new misogynist Archbishop takes up his position. Sister Juana Ines de la Cruz is still a symbol of Mexican nationalism and women’s rights to this day. Another play which has promoted debate amongst our audiences.

“When Jerry Lyne arranged his auditions for *Ghosts*, which was our May production, I don’t think he was expecting more than 40 people to audition. It seems that we are not only breaking records with audience numbers but also with auditionee numbers. A wide choice of actors can only help to raise the overall standard of the production. It was interesting to see how popular a classic still is both with audiences and actors.

“In June the dreamlike Eurydice was directed by Sam Chittenden, which invited us to enter the underworld and to think about love, grief, memory and the spaces between waking and sleep, life and death. This was a truly magical production.

“The season ended in July with a series of Shorts. Five plays, five Directors new to NVT, which allowed potential Directors to try their hand with the view to moving on to direct a full-length play in the future. This is how we stop our pool of Directors from stagnating, support people and help them to navigate the systems in place at NVT when directing and open up opportunity to fresh talent.

“In turn, they can see if this is something that they would like to do in the future and have a much better understanding of what the task of directing involves. Indeed, from the last set of Shorts we have three Directors in this year’s season directing full-length plays.

“It has become a tradition of mine to draw attention to the supporting roles which have to be filled in order to put on each play. Last season, there were 14 Directors and 87 actors played roles of which 46 were female and 41 male. However, the often unsung heroes of the season are all the other people who did the 325 jobs to enable these plays to go on. If we then add to that number the box office and bar staff we need for every night that number then becomes 645.

“I would like to say thank you to them. Without someone getting on and doing these jobs we wouldn’t have, to name but a few, a set, lighting, sound, a poster, a programme, publicity, a costume to wear, a ticket to buy or a drink in the interval. Our success is due largely to not only having good directors and casts but also to the amazingly good support teams and the good will of so many of our members to want to help.

“To finish, I would like to reflect on a conversation I had in the bar after a recent show when I was told that there was no point in putting a play forward to direct at NVT because it is ‘a closed shop and they only put their friends in’. Briefly, the way the process happens is this:

“From November onwards the window to propose to direct opens and the form is located on the website. The script and application is read by the Artistic team, which is made up of 7 people. We meet regularly and juggle all the information. Some of the things to be considered:

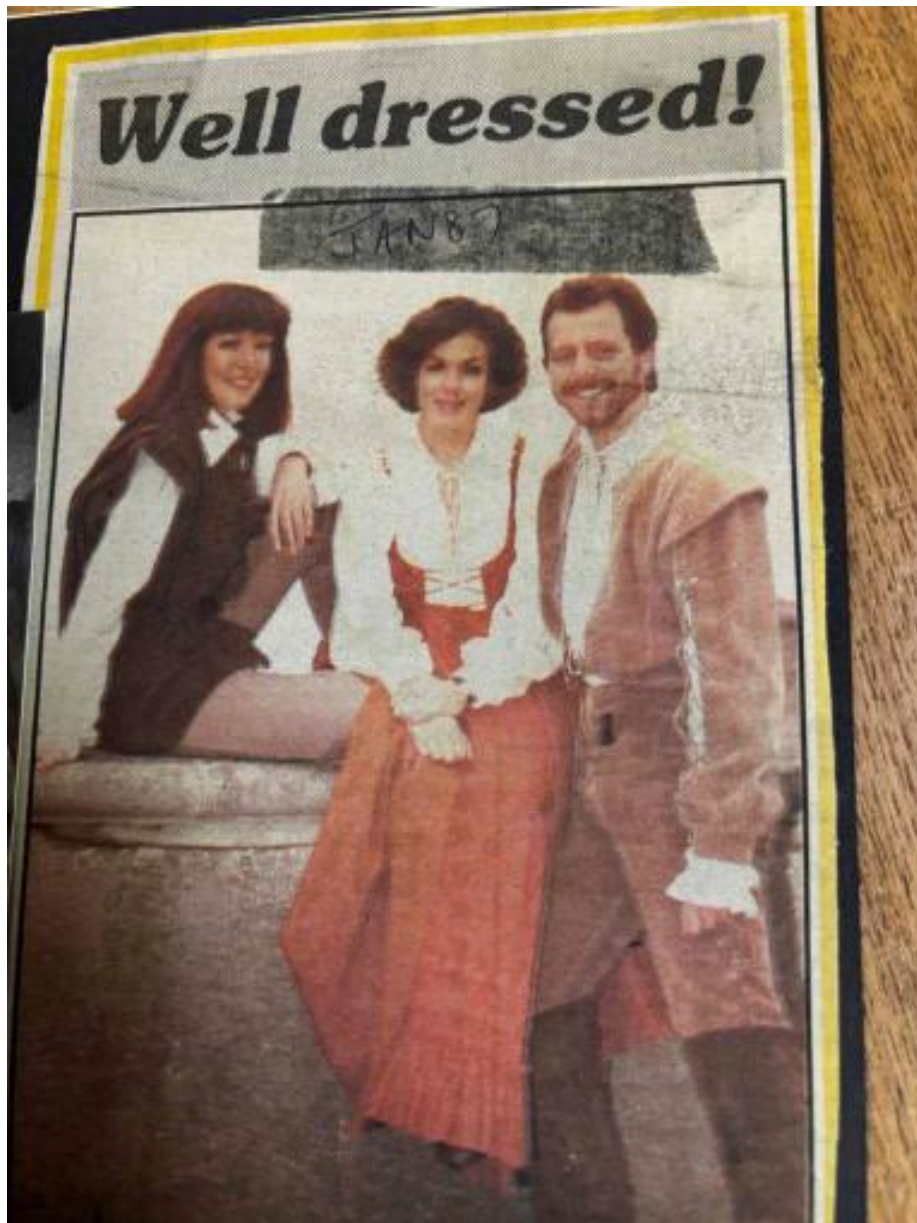
- Where the play is to be played (main house or studio)
- When the Director is available
- Number in cast, range of males and females
- Nature of play
- Complexity of set
- Lighting demands
- Budget

“By the end of February, the window for applications closes and we spend March deciding on the plays for the season. This is done as a vote from the team. Obviously, I take ultimate responsibility for the season choices but it is not done as suggested in the conversation I mentioned earlier.

“My main aim is to have a season which may challenge and have an element or two of risk but which will also have variety, give opportunity to new people and which will continue to maintain our high standards and financial status thus enabling us to continue to have this wonderful facility.

I am, as always, grateful to have the NVT in my life. It is a privilege to work with so many talented and dedicated people who want, as I do, to make sure that NVT is a happy place where we want to come and volunteer. Once again, I thank the Officers, Role holders and the many members who give their personal support to me.”

Katie Brownings, Artistic Director



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, and it could be you!

For further information, please contact the Angel Coordinator:

Gerry McCrudden - angels@newventure.org.uk

UK taxpayer? Your donation may also benefit from the GiftAid scheme.

MEMBERSHIP

Become a Member:

Amongst other benefits, the annual £15 Membership (£10 student or unwaged) gives you reduced price NVT tickets and the opportunity to become involved.

Whilst we appreciate that for some people membership is just about watching the amazing range of plays staged during the season, we also actively encourage our members to get involved.

Everyone who volunteers on a regular basis must be a member.

To join, renew or check your membership details, just go to:
www.newventure.org.uk/join-us

ANGELS@NEWVENTURE.ORG.UK

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4000 Days Review

By Susanne Crosby on Brighton Source

Can you imagine losing the last 11 years of your life? That is just one of the questions Peter Quilter's intensely thought-provoking play asks us in this fascinating three person drama. The story centres around Michael who in a stunningly realised hospital room complete with visible monitor and drip. He lies in bed completely still, with oxygen mask, in a three week coma. The two orbiting and colliding around him are his fiercely matriarchal mother Carol and his partner of the past 10 years: Paul. They have very different and opposing views of what exactly is best for Michael; although the love they both have for the man in the bed is clear in the subtext of everything they say.

Not only is this a compelling and engrossing play, it features some captivating performances by the three actors. Katie Brownings is incredible as the outwardly strong and often dislikable mum, playing her as a grounded and real person with utter contempt for Paul in some scenes. Yet she plays her with a fascinating layering, brittleness and hidden vulnerability that she garners sympathy even when she's trying to control her son's life. She firmly believes that she should be the most important person in Paul's life, and this power play fuels her. Rich Watkins is equally strong as Michael, with some deliciously delivered cheeky banter, matching his powerful mother in scenes where he clearly shows that although he doesn't say it outright, he will not be controlled. Their mother and son relationship is so believable, exemplified by the easy way they share a matchmaker style chocolate which is one of the many gorgeous moments.

Mitch Jenkins completes the three, with an intriguingly understated performance of partner Paul which is such an unusual choice. The mutual loathing between him and Carol is played as a seething undertone that quietly bubbles like lava underneath their interactions that occasionally bursts out mainly from Carol: it beautifully wrongfoots us, as we expect to see a controlling g.



partner, but we see someone who loves and cares deeply for Michael, prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice when nothing of their life together is remembered; criticising himself for helping to change and mute Michael's creativity. His red rimmed tear filled eyes in one scene where he berates himself is both devastating and captivating.

This is a play which challenges us all, but like the pieces of art which Michael creates on the walls of his hospital room, each of us will see different things mirrored back. If everyone around you suddenly said it was 11 years later than you thought, wouldn't you initially want to believe your own mind, and view them as having some ulterior gaslighting motive? Rich Watkins' reactions, reading the carefully curated stack of newspapers so he can catch up on the world: Brexit, Trump, Covid, Lockdown - are heartbreaking, and we feel for him, as we think back to all that's changed since 2015. More than that, his obvious want to remember and connect with the man who says he's been his partner for the past 10 years is so emotional, as is Mitch Jenkins responses as Paul, trying to be respectful yet desperate for his life: their life together, to have mattered. The push and pull between them is like watching a little energy dance played out on the stage.

After all, what is memory? As Paul says, it's not truth. But our perception of our lives are no less important, even if they are just perceptions. It's of course possible to get wildly philosophical about the themes in this play: what defines our characters, our personalities: is it the memories we make, the memories we have of who we are? But if we go too far down that rabbit hole we might miss that there are times in this play which are hilariously funny, leaving us laughing out loud at life, reminding us not to take everything so seriously. The fact that the relationship is two men lends to the dynamics in the play but mercifully doesn't fall into the trap of being about homophobia: as Carol says to Paul, she just doesn't like him. Yet ultimately, this play leaves us with hope and inspiration: that it's never too late to change your life, to remember parts of yourself you might have forgotten, and to rewrite your own story.

There are so many lovely touches in this production: the not quite blackouts between scenes and the tonal colours in the lights, a gorgeous moment of Michael in a cascade of post-it note memories, and Carol starting the play with her back to the audience: all stunning choices, examples of Charly Sommers' sensitive and acutely perceptive direction. It also features an evocative and lovely soundtrack including Nick Drake, moving from ambient sound to coming from the radio on stage. All the details in this production have been given such wonderful attention and room to breathe. Seen on opening night, some of the transitions were a little hurried, but no doubt this will change as the run progresses: if they do and they become more part of the story, this production would be absolutely perfect.

Susanne Crosby is a Brighton based writer, actor, director and creative who adores theatre. She is an award winning playwright of both critical and popular success, having penned over 14 performed plays, written scripts, short stories, edited books, plays and scripts, published award winning poetry and a novel. She reviews theatre for Brighton Source Magazine, Broadway Baby and the National Operatic and Dramatic Association.

This review was originally published on Brighton Source on 18th January 2026.

MORE THAN JUST ACTING

New Venture Theatre is so much more than what you see on stage. It's a living, breathing creative ecosystem, with loads of different roles that make every production possible.

You don't have to be an actor to be part of the magic.

Behind-the-Scenes Heroes

- **Stage Management**
 - Stage management is where organisation meets creativity. From rehearsals to curtain call, stage managers keep everything running smoothly, making sure the show is quite literally ready to go on. If you love lists, problem-solving, and being at the heart of the action, this one's for you.
- **Bar Crew**
 - Our bar team helps create that warm, welcoming atmosphere audiences love. It's sociable, fun, and a brilliant way to meet people while supporting the theatre. Pulling pints, pouring prosecco, or helping during interval rushes. And every drink served helps keep the lights on!
- **Tech: Lights & Sound**
 - Techies are the unsung heroes of theatre. Lighting and sound shape the mood, heighten emotion, and make moments unforgettable. Whether you're experienced or keen to learn, this is a hands-on, creative role where you can see the impact of your work every night.
- **Production Management**
 - Production managers are the ultimate jugglers, keeping timelines, budgets, and teams moving in the same direction. It's about seeing the whole show come together and making sure nothing falls through the cracks. A perfect role for organisers, planners, and calm heads.
- **Set Building**
 - Set building is where imagination becomes reality. Saw, paint, build, repeat. If you enjoy practical work or fancy learning new skills, this is a wonderfully creative way to leave your mark on a production... quite literally.

There are so many opportunities to be creative, learn new skills, and contribute to something special. Every role matters... and, quite simply, we can't make it happen without you.

GET-INVOLVED@NEWVENTURE.ORG.UK

Strat Mastoris

W.M.D

“They thought of Helen as a woman - but actually she was a weapon ...”

Strat Mastoris is a photographer with a long-standing passion for theatre. At NW he has directed *A Rational Death*, *A Number*, a Genet double bill (*The Maids* and *Deathwatch*), *Love Letters*, and *Seven Jewish Children*. He has also designed lighting and sets for numerous productions, created many NW posters, and reviews theatre for FringeReview. *W.M.D.* is his first play. This article looks at Strat’s experience of producing *W.M.D.*

This article explores Strat’s experience of producing *W.M.D.*, offering insight into the creative process behind bringing his debut script to the stage.



In October 2025 at NVT, we staged my play about Helen of Troy. It was originally scripted on a playwriting course at Brighton’s A.C.T. and I subsequently deepened and extended the piece to its current length.

Most of us know the story of the Trojan War – Queen Helen of Sparta gets seduced away by Prince Paris, and the Greeks mount a great expedition to get her back, culminating in the deception of the Wooden Horse and the destruction of the city. I’d read versions of Homer’s tale since childhood – but when I came to look at the map of the region, what jumped out was the incredibly strategic position of Troy: right at the mouth of the narrow channel between the Mediterranean and the Black sea – a vital trade route in Bronze Age times. That power, and Troy’s ability to raise transit fees to punitive levels, would pose an economic threat to the Mycenaean Greeks, sufficiently serious to require a war to eliminate the city.



But Troy was actually a part of the powerful Hittite empire, located in what's now Turkey, so the Greeks needed an excuse to create enough outrage to justify war - so in my version they used Helen as a 'honey-trap' to do the seduction herself, and get Paris to carry her off to Troy. Truly a Woman of Mass Deception. A complete reversal of Homer, but much more likely.

And of course these lies and deceptions were mirrored in Tony Blair's statements about Saddam Hussein's 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' - W.M.D. - in the lead-up to the 2003 Gulf War. Also, don't forget President Trump's recent threats to raise tariffs. Nothing changes in politics in three and a half thousand years ...

I was offered the opportunity to stage 'W.M.D. Woman of Mass Deception' as part of a double-bill, along with 'Seawall', directed by Frankie Knight. Simon Stephens' play is written to be produced without any set at all, apart from a few blocks for the single actor to sit on. Perfect, then, for someone like me, who likes to work as minimally as possible - trusting the audience to create the locations in their own minds. I wanted to give the audience something radical and new - a complete reimagining of Homer - but also upping the intensity of the narrative by keeping all the action in one location.

We chose to do the plays in our Studio theatre - walls and floor painted black; with W.M.D. as the second half, after the interval. I love both our NVT performance spaces, but the Studio - in its L shape seating arrangement - allows the action to move downstage, almost into the audience, and the effect can be quite three-dimensional.

I designed the production to have just a single setting - the Treasurer's office at Mycenae - and a cast of only five. Mark Lester as Agamemnon, Jo Salter as Agamemnon's daughter Iphigenia, Kasha Goodenough as Helen, and Rich Watkins as Odysseus. These are all Homer's characters, and my script created the Treasurer of Mycenae, played by Jeremy Crow, to tie the story together. Actually, there were six - the slippery-tongued Odysseus became Tony Blair in the final scene.

I found an elegant table to serve as the Treasurer's desk, which split into two to be hidden offstage during the first half. The black blocks were rearranged as a shelf to hold the Treasurer's wine. I hate clunky scene changes, so we simply used the table as the House of Commons Dispatch Box for the scenes with Tony Blair in Parliament. Like all Prime ministers, he leans on it as he makes a statement to the Commons.

Just these few basic elements gave the audience all the location cues they needed, with the cast entering between the columns of Simon Glazier's portable doorway, which was deployed for 'W.M.D.' during the interval, and Judith Berrill's wonderful wall painting (over two metres wide and hidden by a black curtain during 'Sea Wall') acting as a visual guide for the geographic locations of the play, as well as rich decoration for the walls of Agamemnon's palace. The lighting gave us daylight streaming through a 'window' in the corner, through which Princess Iphigenia could glimpse the sea in the distance, past Argos. In a later scene, the lighting changed to a ghostly green as Iphigenia's ghost told us of her sacrifice: slaughtered on an altar by her father's hand, to allow a wind for the

Greek fleet to sail. For the final section featuring Tony Blair, the wall painting was left in darkness to focus all attention on Rich Watkins' masterful portrayal of the Prime Minister.

I was very fortunate to have a cast of brilliant actors who brought my characters to vivid life, as well as Carrie Hynds who was incredibly supportive as assistant director (and a second pair of eyes), and Moon Berglind, who oversaw the smooth running of both plays as Stage Manager. But we also had hugely talented costume designers/makers. Karen Hindmarsh and Jackie Jones researched Mycenaean and Minoan costumes to produce an authentic feel to the production. No togas, but kilts for the aristocratic men – remember that the Trojan War took place a thousand years before the classical Greece of Euripides and Aeschylus. Jackie Jones cut Helen's dress with panels on the slant, following ancient wall paintings of high-status women.

Interestingly – Jackie noted how cutting the panels in that way created a lot of waste fabric and must have increased the cost substantially. But maybe that was the point: conspicuous consumption by the elite. I love that we might have learned something about Mycenaean society by doing this play, as well as getting an insight into the realpolitik behind Homer's great poem.





Sea Wall
by **Simon Stephens**
directed by **Frankie Knight**
<https://stratmastorisphotography.com/>

TICKET PRICE INCREASE

From the start of our new season in October 2026, there will be a small change to our ticket prices.

Member tickets will increase from £10 to £12, and non-member tickets from £12 to £14.

A Small Rise, A Big Thank You!

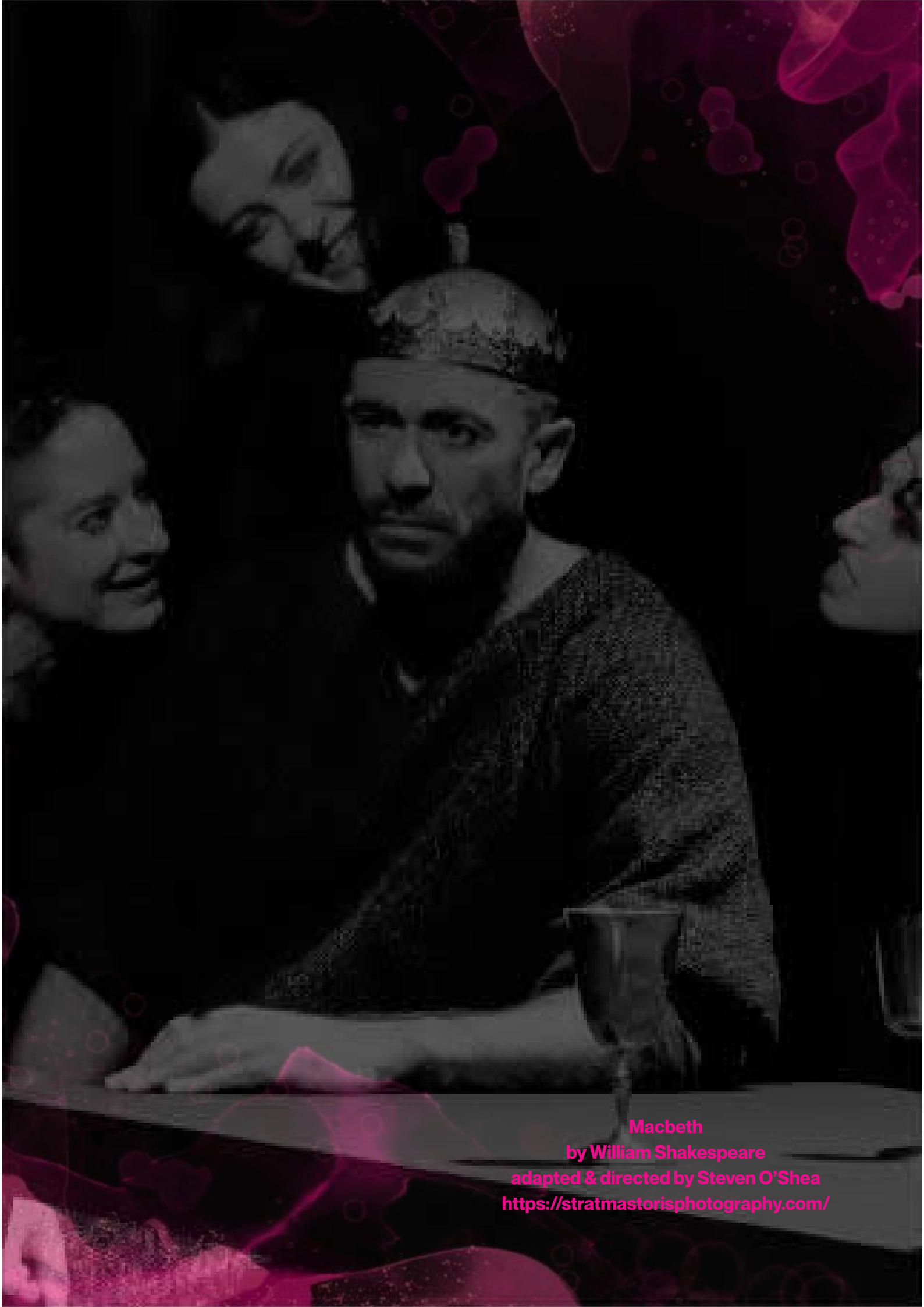
We know no one loves a price rise (us included!) but this modest adjustment helps us keep bringing high-quality productions to our stage whilst covering the ever-growing costs of rights, sets, costumes, and keeping the lights shining brightly.

The good news... Membership remains the same.

It's still just £15 per year (or £10 for students and unwaged patrons) and continues to offer excellent value across the season.

As always, every ticket you buy supports our charity and the brilliant community that makes it all possible. Thank you for being part of it.

We can't wait to welcome you for another fantastic season.



Macbeth

by William Shakespeare

adapted & directed by Steven O'Shea

<https://stratmastorisphotography.com/>

ACTING CLASS

Our acting classes are designed to be engaging, supportive, and enjoyable for everyone involved.

- Anyone can attend the acting class (must be over 18yrs)
- Classes run most Mondays as listed above. No classes in August, September & Christmas.
- Classes are pre-booked online
- Class numbers are limited so it is good to book ahead
- Refunds and exchanges are not available
- Each month usually has a themed series of classes, but you can book for just one, or more, as you wish

Acting Classes are - £8 (£4 for NVT members) per class

Attending the acting class is a great way to get involved with what we do and find out about auditions and productions. Classes start at 7.30pm and end at 9.30pm. Please arrive in good time to begin promptly at 7.30pm.

To find out more, book a ticket and come along to a class or to request more information about a particular block of sessions, please email rather than the phone as we do not have the resources to manage the calls.

ACTINGCLASS@NEWVENTURE.ORG.UK

[HTTPS://WWW.NEWVENTURE.ORG.UK/](https://www.newventure.org.uk/)



Eurydice
by Sarah Ruhl
directed by Sam Chittenden
<https://stratmastorisphotography.com/>



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Don't forget to tag us on social media and leave a review!

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

SEATING & ACCESSIBILITY

STUDIO THEATRE

The Studio has unallocated seating. There is one step at the entrance; a temporary ramp is available.

THEATRE UPSTAIRS

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.

