

NETWORKING

The Newsletter of the Network Theatre Company

NETWORK THEATRE, 246A LOWER ROAD, WATERLOO, LONDON SE1 8SJ

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Spring Edition

April 08

The Suburban Spaceman: Life on Planet Billabop



Alison Morris, Rosie De Vekey & Sheila Murphy star as aliens - Photo by Paul Lunnon

Dear Networkers,

Welcome to the Spring edition of Networking!

I do hope that this newsletter goes to print in colour so that you get the full effect of the technicolour dream team of aliens seated above on the casting couch of The Suburban Spaceman. When else would you get to see a top to toe (do aliens have toes?) blue Rosie, a totally tangoed Sheila or a perfectly pink Alison? Congratulations to the cast and crew of The Suburban Spaceman, for providing February's fabulous fun factor.

Hot off the press too, we have a review of the brilliant Bazaar and Rummage, which hit the stage last week. Hats off to the all female cast, the so solid crew and whoever found Fliss's dungarees ☺

We also talk to Jennie Rich, director of Network's next show, Humble Boy.

Enjoy,
The Editor

Bazaar and Rummage



Gwenda (Kimberly Bradshaw) and Katrina (JoJo Micallef):

Photo by Andy Bradshaw

All submissions are welcome.

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The Humble Boy by Charlotte Jones

Performances: Weds 11th- 14th June 08

Felix Humble is not having a good summer. Searching for peace in his late father's garden, he is disturbed by his mother's plans to remarry so early into widowhood. Family secrets are revealed as Felix tries to convince his mother that George Pye isn't the man for her. Will he succeed or will unnatural forces intervene? A bittersweet tale of bees, astrophysics and love.

CAST LIST

Felix - Andy Barratt
Flora - Helen Mason
George - Kevin Healy
Mercy - Samantha Bullock
Jim - Paul D'Orly
Rosie - Alison Rycroft

An Interview with Jennie Rich, Director

1. Come on then... why did you want to direct Humble Boy?

I fell in love with the play when I saw it. It has so many different elements surrounding the main story eg bees, love, Gazpacho soup, astrophysics.... And the big twist at the end took it to a new level for me. It was strange at the end of my first play reading. Normally people start to leave and head to the pub. This time everyone sat in silence, taking it in. If I can get that reaction from the audience, I'll be very happy.

2. Did you see the first performance of Humble Boy in August 2001 at the Royal National Theatre (directed by John Caird, starring Simon Russell Beale & Dame Diana Rigg)?

I saw it when it transferred to the West End. It was a birthday present to myself. Having seen him in *Candide*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* at the National, I decided that Simon Russell Beale was one of my favourite actors. His characters have depth and are believable.

3. Do you see many parallels between Humble Boy and a certain Shakespeare play?

Lets leave it to the audience to see if they can recognise which Shakespeare play you are talking about and whether they can draw any parallels.

4. How are rehearsals going?

It's early days at the moment. Some of the cast were boogying on down to Glenn Miller last night. I'm seeing the beginnings of some nice characterisation from my cast and Hannah, my AD is very supportive.

5. How do you see the set reflecting both the Cotswolds and Felix's intellectual world?

Helen Mason, who is also playing Flora, is designing the set for me. Busy lady! Again, it's still early days. Sadly, it will be a bit impractical to raid the nearest garden centre. However, it looks like there is going to be some nice, summery, honey-like elements. It's more the world of Felix's late father, then Felix himself.

6. Who is Felix Humble and what do the bees represent in your mind?

Felix is a person almost literally being torn apart by the questions buzzing in his head. As an astro-physicist, he is so focused on analysing everything, that he fails to see what is going on right in front of him. At times, the truth is unbearable for him. However, there are times when he uses his intelligence and wit to try and undermine his mother's unsuitable suitor. At the end of the play, he is dignified in the face of defeat. As for the bees, they represent for Felix, his dead father. For me, they represent some sort of supernatural force. Maybe nature ensuring that all is fair in love and war:-)

7. How can we help you? Do you need crew/costumes etc?

I have most of my crew. I just need someone to operate sound. I'll need construction experts with power tools and painters for set builds on 31st May and 7th June. Andy will need cricketing whites as Felix. Helen will need a sun-lounger to recline gracefully on. Has anyone made Gazpacho before? I might enlist Michael Mayne's stage fighting expertise for the fisticuffs. If anyone can help, please get in touch on 0705 0105241.

8. Dame Diana Rigg or Felicity Kendal as Flora? ;-)

Ooh, controversial! Sadly, I missed the Dame's performance. I can clearly see her playing the part but Felicity Kendal gave her a good run for her money. Whilst Flora comes across as a manipulative, vain woman, the actress playing her needs to bring out the grief and guilt that is under the surface. Helen showed some of this in her audition.

9. Humble Boy could be described as a 'tragi-comedy'. Which angle are you pushing?

Both! There are incidents with the jar of ashes that used to be Felix's father that are really funny on the surface, yet when you think about it are quite tragic.

A Review by Eileen Heaney of Sue Townsend's Bazaar & Rummage

I had always enjoyed the humour in Sue Townsend's books but had not realised that she also wrote plays so coming to Bazaar & Rummage was a new experience for me. Agoraphobia as a basis for a comedy seems a little strange, but Sue Townsend had skilfully mixed comedy with the much more serious undertones of why these women were suffering.

When Sue Townsend wrote the play she set it in the present which at that time was the early eighties; the Network Director, Mary Alice Stack, wisely decided to treat it as a period piece rather than attempt to update the tastes, costumes and the rather politically incorrect language. Although some of the language makes us wince today I was surprised to find that the underlying themes such as the fear of street crime and community policing are just as topical today as they obviously were in the eighties.

The simplicity of the box set meant that for once David Harvey and his team were not overstretched, there were some nice touches to the dressing of the set that made it into a church hall, the Tiny Tots corner with its posters, the shrunken balloons left over from some earlier event. The lighting was also simple and the change when individual characters were focussed upon was very effective – also nice projection of Barry Manilow onto one wall. The opening music was too quiet and I felt that it needed to have a much stronger eighties' sound to set the scene. I must congratulate Su Vigus for her excellent composing, each song being beautifully tailored to the character singing it; this added much to the overall performance, but I also have to congratulate her for her lovely cameo as the wreck of a WPC.

Anne Chauveau had the unenviable task of Costumes & Props, her heart must have sunk when she saw how specific some of the requirements were!

The tables full of all sorts of unwanted items – I longed to be up on stage having a rummage to see what bargains I could get.

The costumes were well thought out from Fliss's dungarees and Doc Martens through to Katrina's legwarmers with white stilettos. Bell-Bell's neat outfit, not a hair out of place and Gwenda's Polyester (as said in the script, but I think Crimplene conjures up a better image) contrasted with Margaret's "not bovered" look.



Helen Mason's performance as OCD sufferer Bell-Bell was so authentic that it reminded me of someone I actually knew in the 80s.

Eilidh Nairn got Fliss, the trainee social worker, spot on as the middle class rebel trying not to get sucked into the group.

← Fliss (Eilidh Nairn) and (Bell Bell) Helen Mason: Photo by Andy Bradshaw

When Helen Manders as the bolshy Margaret arrived on the scene she immediately lowered the tone and lifted the pace, this was an excellent and moving performance as the abused single mother.

It is still rare to see a play with an all female cast and Mary Alice Stack had gathered together a very strong team for this production. It was good to see one of our long term members, Kimberley Bradshaw, back on the boards in the pivotal role of Gwenda, the self-important busybody, oblivious to what the others think of her. Kimberley showed consummate skill in her tearful outbursts and in showing her vulnerability to the audience.. Newcomer JoJo Micallef handled the role of the glamorous and pampered singer Katrina very skilfully, Bell-Bell's and Gwenda's duet on the Fur song and the group's song Panic Attack were a joy to see and hear.

Being a long term member of the Network Theatre Company means that I served at our own Jumble Sales (in a church hall at Raynes Park) so this play brought back many memories in particular I was able to closely identify with Gwenda's briefing on the "rules" for a successful sale, thank you for reminding me of those days.

This was a good production, nicely paced and well judged between playing for laughs and uncovering the underlying issues. This was more than a comedy, by the end of the play the audience understood why these women behaved in the way they did and we wanted to believe that this was a new beginning for them. It is thanks to the skill of the director and the actors that we were able to care about these women and their future, so well done to all those involved in this production.

Network Productions on Tour

Last year we saw Gabby Vautier's *A Karaoke Wedding* and Kirsty Eyre's *Class*, both originally performed at Network Theatre in 2006, go on to hit other stages near and far. *A Karaoke Wedding* went on to a very successful run in London's Union theatre, whilst *Class* transferred to the Edinburgh Fringe festival... but this year, it's not just the girls who are on tour.

Network's Keith Wait has worked his socks off to get *Facades* (his very own handiwork, performed last year at Network) out to a wider audience and boy has the boy done good! *Facades* is now being rehearsed in preparation for a double run at Merton Abbey Mill's 'the colour house' and then onto Riverside Studios.

Moving from venue to venue has its challenges. Not only does it mean a double marketing effort with different audiences and a huge logistical effort in carting kit across London, it also means that the Director and Stage Manager have their work cut out in terms of adapting set and blocking around different stage configurations. A highly organised Keith is on the case. Keith has given his script a thorough spring clean with feedback from its previous run at Network and is just about ready for you to see the results.

Please come and support Keith and his cast and crew (many are our Network buddies):

FACADES, written & directed by Keith Wait, **performances:**

7.30pm, Weds 23rd April – Mon 5th May (no performance Tues 29th April), matinee 2.30pm, 5th May
at **the colour house**, Merton Abbey Mills, London, SW19 2RD

Tickets £10, concessions £8

Box Office: colourhousetheatre.co.uk 020 8542 551

7.30pm, Mon 19th – Thurs 29th May (except Sun 25th May 6pm), matinee 2.30pm, Mon 26th May
Riverside Studios, Crisp Road, Hammersmith, London W6 9RL

Tickets £12.50, concessions £10, cheap midweek Tues 27 and both Weds £7.50

Box Office: riversidestudios.co.uk 020 8237 1111



Photo © Andy Bradshaw 2007 andybradshaw.com

Spring 1787, and the exceptional empress, Catherine the Great, is making a royal progress, inspecting her New Russia. Prince Potemkin, her former lover, needs to impress. He is pouring his fortune into building towns along the route, but how can he do it fast enough?

Feydor, the Prince's former campaign advisor, oversees the works. He now has a small army of theatrical set builders! Potemkin wants scale and grandeur, and as more men, materials and gold arrive, the canvas buildings take on a deceptive permanence. Soon the sham disguises the real, while the real hides the sham.

The enigmatic young stowaway, Lida, has hidden herself in Feydor's quarters. She is very ambitious to exploit the situation. Is she a child of betrayal, or its mistress? For here in the Crimean hinterland, all is not as it seems.

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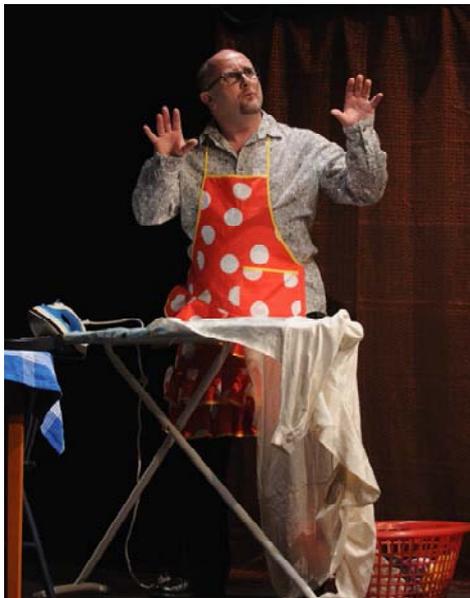
"Astonishing" Richard Burgess, *Networking* Review

A review by Harry Blake of The Suburban Spaceman

Finding an idea for a new musical is not as easy as it sounds - gone are the days of boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy and girl are subsequently reunited by the power of song and dance. No, in this world of Jerry Springer the Opera and Menopause the musical, the crazier the subject the better. So, top marks for originality to Kirsty Eyre for following up Class with her deliciously camp Douglas-Adams-meets-David-Brent musical, The Suburban Spaceman.

I'm sure a well-deserved second airing of the show is in the pipeline, so I won't give away too many of the plot's twists and turns. Suffice to say that the piece takes us from Hobnob-munching suburbia into outer space, poking fun at the Kafka-esque bureaucracy of office life en route.

The score, by Kirsty Eyre and Shale Morgan, offers a witty pot-pourri of musical styles - sending up political correctness, reality television and business acronyms. It was a shame that not all of the music was originally composed (the score was supplemented by two versions of a Wizard of Oz track) but I'm assured that this will be the case in the rewrite. One lyrical highlight for me was 'I must upgrade my motor, from a Fiat to a Toyota' sung by Andy Bradshaw as Stanley, the hapless househusband cum Suburban Spaceman as he reclaims his masculinity (he wants to be Tarzan to Jane, Superman to Lois Lane... not David Furnish to Elton).



Stanley (Andy Bradshaw) and Ruth (Victoria Waddington) seducing Benjamin (Sean McMullan): Photos by Paul Lunnon

Playing opposite him was Victoria Waddington's formidable Ruth Robinson, whose seduction of Sean McMullan's Benjamin through song, 'Step inside my office', was another highlight for me.

Special mention must go to Barry Clarke, Michael Mayne and Steve Siddals (playing Marco, Bob and Thomas respectively) for gamely baring all in the name of musical theatre - their semi naked appearance in Act II ensured that, no matter temperature outside, the atmosphere inside the theatre was pretty darn steamy! The multi-talented Eyre was also on fine form (although a little hoarse by the end of the run) as devoted housewife Daphne, and managed to achieve moments of genuine pathos amid the madcap goings on - an essential for any good piece of musical theatre. Her beloved Alfie, a pivotal role in the link between planet earth and planet Billabop, was played by Matthew Griffiths who did a superb job as the nutty professor...and being chained into a wardrobe for half an hour as the plot unveiled.

Another fantastic coup de theatre came when the onset curtain opened to reveal a garish assortment of aliens, played by the fabulous Sheila Murphy, Alison Morris and Rosie de Vekey as presenters of Down to Earth, an alien reality TV show. Mike Wyer's tyrannical Head of the Universe and his henchman Blip, played by Samina Gerard Moreau, added to the brightly coloured residents of Planet Billabop. Siobhan Hughes and Sharon Hunjan added another zany dimension to the Suburban Spaceman in their comic chorus appearances and Eve Dautremant Tomas and Imelda Maguire made a wonderful comic duo as Matilda and Florence capturing the hearts of the audience.

At its heart, the Suburban Spaceman explores the notion that the 21st century woman must at some point choose between her family and her career. With a well-drilled, energetic supporting cast, witty lyrics and cracking tunes, the show touches on issues of feminism and man's emasculation with mercurial lightness. Congratulations must go to Kay Murray on bringing the show to life and exploiting every comic opportunity possible.

Dates for your Diary	
Three Musketeers Read through for fun	7pm, 23 rd April
Reading of iff	7pm, 8 th May
Auditions for iff	6.30pm 13 th and 15 th May
Performances of The Humble Boy	7.30pm Weds 11 th - Sat 14 th June
Reading of Opposites Attract	7pm, 10 th July
Auditions for Opposites Attract	6.30pm, 15 th & 17 th July
Performances of iff	7.30pm Weds 23 rd - Sat 26 th July
Reading of The Three Musketeers	7pm, 18 th September
Auditions for The Three Musketeers	6.30pm, 23 rd & 25 th September
Performances of Opposites Attract	7.30pm, Weds 1 st – Sat 4 th October
Performances of The Three Musketeers	7.39pm, Weds 10 th – Sat 13 th December

iff by Andrew N. Hill

Director: Nigel Williams

Read through 8 May at 7pm, Auditions 13 & 15 May from 6.30pm

Performances 23-26 July at 7.30pm

This is the first staging of a new play by Andrew N Hill. When writing the pilot episode for a new TV cop show Alan has to confront a dilemma: should he kill off the character he has turned into a model police officer, a responsible and caring mother with a partner and two children while allowing her alcoholic superior officer to live? Or should he kill off someone merely because of being an alcoholic with no close family? But they're fictional aren't they? He isn't really going to kill anyone is he? Alan's philosophical and academic dilemma suddenly takes on a very real dimension and he becomes unable to separate the fiction from the real world. But things may not be quite what they seem.

(M) Alan Peterson, an English writer, 40s
 (M) Mark Tranchard, an NYPD lieutenant
 (M) Harvey Cooper, an NYPD Sergeant, 30s
 (M) John Sinclair, Gemma's partner
 (M) Federal Agent Jackson
 (M) Jim Fraser, a Alan's literacy agent, 40s
 (M/F) Doctor

(F) Gemma Hale, an HYPD Sergeant, 30s
 (F) Olivia Peterson, Alan's wife, 30s
 (F) Julia Fraser, Jim's wife, 30s
 (F) Officer Jacobs, an NYPD police officer
 (F) Mandy, Gemma's sister
 (M/F) Conjuror

Opposites Attract by Bruce Kane

Read through 10 July at 7pm, Auditions 15 & 17 July from 6.30 pm

Performances 1-4 October at 7.30 pm

A one act comedy play about love, romance, infidelity, emotional masochism, envy, therapy, bad sex, letting go, getting caught and all the other things that make modern relationships so much fun. Within every disastrous relationship, the seeds of destruction are planted long before the people even meet. The play is made up of 11 vignettes including but not limited to a passionate, yet disastrous relationship between two emotional masochists; an open sexual partnership that almost goes under when one partner admits he hasn't been cheating; to a grass is always greener threesome in which two women pine for what the other has, only to get it.

The Three Musketeers by Willis Hall adapted from the novel by Alexandre Dumas.

Director: Leigh Shine

Read through for fun 23 April at 7pm, Pre-audition read through 18 September at 7pm,

Auditions 23 & 25 September from 6.30pm

Performances 3-6 & 10-13 December at 7.30pm.

This swashbuckling tale is brought to the stage in a lively, tongue-in-cheek version. D'Artagnan, a young Gascon, goes to Paris to join King Louis XIII's Musketeers, is befriended by three valiant members of that force, Athos, Porthos and Aramis, and shares their adventures, foiling the evil plans of Cardinal Richelieu and Milady de Winter to discredit Louis' wife, Anne. A splendid romp with the director bringing some seasonal traditions to the production.