

Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

April 2012

Dear Networkers,

This month we are delighted to include the review of *Harvey*. We look forward to the forthcoming production of *Pack of Lies*, coming to Network later this month, read our interview with director, Terry Wynne to find out more.

We are looking for more volunteers for the bar and front of house for *Pack of Lies*. Please email info@networktheatre.org to volunteer.

Huge congratulations to our London Marathon runners Cathy Neeson and Imelda Maguire! Also, we wish all the best to Dan Young and his new bride, Sarah, who got married last week.

Dates for your diary:

Tickets are on sale for *Pack of Lies* 25th - 28th April.

Buy tickets now at:

<http://www.networktheatre.org/PackLies/>

Tickets are on sale for *Henry V* 14th - 23rd June.

<http://www.networktheatre.org/HenryV/>

Reading for *The Cherry Orchard* 20th June 7pm.

Rosie de Vekey

Editor

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Interview with Terry Wynne, Director of *Pack of Lies* (25th-28th April)

What attracted you to the play?

I remember seeing this play when it was first performed in the West End in 1983/4. The leads were taken by Judi Dench and her husband Michael Williams. The story of innocent lives caught up in an intrigue not of their own making made an impression on me and so my familiarity with the play made for an easy transition when we were unable to obtain a licence for 'Breaking the Code' by the same author.

On a more sentimental level, I saw the original production with my father from whom I gained my enthusiasm for the theatre. He died a year ago, so this, my directorial debut at the Network, is in a way a tribute to him.



Can you give us a brief synopsis of the piece?

The play is based on the historical events relating to the Portland spy ring described below but centres firmly on the domestic. It concerns the impact of these events on the Jacksons, an innocent family. The early scenes, set in 1960, show the totally unsuspecting Jackson household - Bob, Barbara and their daughter Julie - having a normal rushed family breakfast interrupted by the arrival of their best friends and neighbours the Krogers who bring a birthday present for Barbara.

The Jacksons live opposite the Krogers, their closest friends, believing them to be a convivial Canadian

couple. Then a mysterious stranger, presumably from MI5, arrives, who quietly coerces the Jacksons into allowing their house, specifically Julie's bedroom, to be used as a surveillance post. They overcome their reluctance, allow the officers to use Julie's bedroom for daytime observations and Barbara, herself at home all day, actually grows to like Thelma, one of the regular agents.

But, as the surveillance continues and its true objective is gradually revealed, the Jacksons' decent, happy life is shattered as the truth about their much-loved friends is gradually exposed. Barbara reaches breaking point with the agonising realisation that the Krogers have betrayed her and she has betrayed them.

Tell us more about the Portland spy ring.

At the height of the Cold War in the 1950s and 60s, much research into submarine warfare was undertaken by the Navy at the Admiralty Underwater Weapons Establishment at Portland in Dorset. There, a clerk and his girlfriend conspired to steal secret documents outlining the latest technology in weapons development and submarine detection. They passed these via a Russian spy, Gordon Lonsdale, to the 'Krogers' who were living overtly as Canadians at 45 Cranley Drive Ruislip.

Peter Kroger apparently worked as an antiquarian bookseller and Helen was a housewife. They passed the data to Russia using a hidden long-range radio transmitter. This network of five people was known, in the press at the time, as the Portland Spy Ring

What are you planning for the set?

I am delighted to have Helen Mason on board as set designer; Helen combines her expertise in interior and set design to produce innovative and imaginative designs. She is very experienced in acting and design both at The Network and with the Common Touch Theatre Company in Wandsworth for whom she has also recently directed *The Lady in the Van*. She is well known to Network where her designs have included *Humble Boy* and *Blithe Spirit* and has just completed the design brief for NTC's next production *Harvey*.

Her design for *Pack of Lies* is bold and innovative and compliments my interpretation of the play.

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What are the challenges of the piece?

I think one of the challenges is to convey the shock a 1960s family would have had to discover that their friends are Russian spies. Today, Russia is no longer seen as embodying 'the evil empire' and a modern audience may not be able to comprehend the impact this event would have made. Even audiences at the original 1983 production would still have been in fear of the eastern block. Today, however, knowing that communism collapsed spontaneously over 20 years ago does make the historical impact harder to comprehend.

The answer, I think, is to emphasise the universal themes - the play is fundamentally about the pain of betrayal (as well as the inconvenience of having your home invaded by strangers!). I am seeking to portray the disruption of solid domestic scenes by the intrusion of surveillance officers and the impact on this respectable couple of colluding in the arrest of their friends.

Another challenge could have been the American accents but I am very pleased to have a genuine American as Helen Kroger (Stephanie Vaughan), who can coach her 'husband' if necessary!

Pack of Lies - a Tale of Paranoia, Deception and Distrust By Emma Byrne

At the end of April, experienced director Terry Wynne will bring his take on Hugh Whitmore's play, *Pack of Lies*, to the Network stage. The play is based on the true story of a couple in suburban Ruislip in 1961 who led a double life as Soviet spies. While the production is set in the era in which the events took place, the central themes of the play - deceit and distrust - have as much resonance today as they would have done when the play was originally staged during the Cold War.

While 1960s London may have been braced for an attack from the Soviet Union, contemporary London plays out its fears about gang violence, religious terrorism and the riots of the dispossessed on the nightly news. Those same paranoias that existed in the 1960s persist to this day: that an ideologically driven force might attack us for reasons we can barely understand, or that the erosion of the social order might lead to violence and chaos.

The play deftly interweaves these themes, with Stewart (Alastair Callcut), the charming but implacable security officer, representing the certainty of the establishment; Bob (James Laing) as the co-operative member of society who knows their place; and his wife Barbara (Gerry Skeens) as the most conflicted person in the tale who agonises over the moral choices she must make.

Director Terry Wynne has made a wise choice to keep the original early 1960s setting, as bringing the play up to date would have made the sexual politics in particular seem strained and false. Designer Helen Mason has created a minimalist, doll's house set that effectively conveys the place and era with an open stage that heightens the uncomfortable sense of voyeurism and surveillance.

This excellent production raises some important questions about loyalty, truth and power that are as relevant today as they ever were.

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Harvey - A Review

by the Man in the Back Row

Harvey, by Mary Chase, is a hilarious play, telling the story of Elwood P. Dowd, a friendly, thoughtful guy, whose best friend happens to be a six foot rabbit that only he can see. The play starts at a social event hosted by Elwood's sister Vera and her daughter, Martha, who are determined to introduce Martha into polite society before people find out about Harvey the invisible rabbit! After a social embarrassment, Vera decides enough is enough and that she will have Elwood committed. However, whilst explaining her situation to the staff at Chumley's Rest, Vera finds herself committed instead! It is down to Elwood and Harvey to set things right.



Mike Wyer as Elwood
and Christina Houghton
as Vera.

All photographs by
Paul H. Lunnon

Harvey is an extremely funny play and an excellent choice for Network Theatre. The play starts confidently with terrific performances by Christina Houghton as Vera and Sophie Tergeist as a stropky Martha, making a convincing, conniving Mother and Daughter combination. Houghton particularly excels at the physical requirements of the part as she objects wildly to all the situations she finds herself in.

We then meet Elwood (Mike Wyer) who is the undoubted star of the show. Wyer helms the show with an excellent performance, never losing the sweet-nature and likeability of Elwood, even when (convincing) drunkenness is required. He really impresses in this role.



Mark Johnson,
Lee Steggles,
Mike Wyer and
Grace Sobey.

When the action moves to Chumley's Rest, some of the performances may be a little less slick and could be pacier, but still certainly get the laughs. Dr. Sanderson (Lee Steggles) and Nurse Kelly (Grace Sobey) enjoy a nice chemistry and Mark Johnson puts in a hugely energetic turn as the put-upon Wilson. Chris Watkins (as Dr. Chumley) hits a high note when describing how he would like to spend his holidays! Credit should go to Sue Small, Rosie de Vekey, Michael Mayne and Steve Simler who make the most of their smaller roles.



Chris Watkins,
Rosie de Vekey
and Grace Sobey.

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Mark Johnson as Wilson.

Michael Mayne, Christina Houghton, and Sophie Tergeist.

Photographs by Paul H. Lunnon.



Director, Cathy Neeson should be congratulated for choosing this thoughtful and funny piece. Her casting and direction has paid off in this production. Attention to detail down to the curtain call featuring Harvey was impressive and amusing. Credit too must go to Helen Mason for a fantastic set and to Alex Clement for the incredible paintings, which very accurately represented the cast. Congratulations must go to the cast and crew of Harvey for a highly enjoyable night out.

Henry V by William Shakespeare - Network Theatre 14th-25th June.

“Oh for a muse of Fire”

The most famous battle play in history comes to Network this summer.

Amidst the crash of cannons and the clash of bayonets, young King Hal and his red-coated band of brothers will hazard all to win a Kingdom and the love of a beautiful Princess.

Containing some of the best known speeches and most colourful characters Henry V is a soldier's tale, moving from courts to pubs to the muddy Battlefields of France.

Over the years Henry V has been associated with many historical conflicts. This production sets the action between England and France at the time of their most titanic struggle - the era of the Napoleonic Wars.



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The Tempest - production stills



(Top left and right) The ensemble playing Ariel.

(Bottom left) Keith Wait as Prospero and Sally Lofthouse as Miranda.

(Bottom right) Paul Hoskins as Trinculo.

All photographs by Paul H. Lunnon

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Network Needs...

Are you interested in directing in 2013. If you would like to put forward a play or would like more information on our submission process, please contact Kirsty info@networktheatre.org. You can join the conversation on our facebook group too - just join Network Theatre.

Network Theatre is looking for a Webmaster who could build and manage an externally-hosted website. Are you interested? If so, please contact info@networktheatre.org

Network Theatre is after a second-hand Apple Mac. If anyone is interested in donating one to the theatre, we would be very grateful. Please contact info@networktheatre.org

We are looking for a new Front of House Manager:

Duties and Responsibilities:

This is a very important role for Network Theatre. Front of House presents our 'public' face to our audiences. It covers all the audience-facing aspects of our theatre, including box office, auditorium and bar, and involves:

- Coordinating all Front of House activities for Network Theatre Company ('Network') productions
- Arranging bar staff for visiting companies (visiting companies provide their own Front of House, but we operate our bar)
- Representing the Front of House department at committee meetings

You will be the head of the Front of House team, responsible for recruiting and training volunteers. You will not, however, be expected to act as Duty Manager every time the theatre is open. A Production FOH Manager is allocated to each Network production for this purpose, and they are responsible for the smooth running of the theatre during their performances. Visiting companies are responsible during their performances.

Are you interested? If so, please contact info@networktheatre.org

The Network Committee

Our club and our theatre require a lot of "behind the scenes" work to manage and maintain them. This falls to the committee to carry out, or to coordinate other volunteers to help. The committee is elected at the AGM and, like others who volunteer, give their time willingly to keep Network running. The current committee is:

Kay Murray - Chair
Judith Denwood - Secretary
David Harvey - Theatre Manager
Keith Wait - Diary Manager
Moirá Cane - Membership Secretary

Natalie Mensah - Treasurer
Kirsty Eyre - Programme Manager
Dan Young - Technical Manager
Robin Lansman - Committee Liaison/Asst FOH Manager
Rosie de Vekey - Newsletter and Publicity

The committee always welcomes ideas and proposals for Network activities, and volunteers to help Network with the various tasks. E-mail us at info@networktheatre.org or corner one of us at an event!

All submissions are welcome. Please send to the editor at news@networktheatre.org.

Network Theatre, 246a Lower Road, Waterloo, London SE1 8SJ

For all the latest information go to www.networktheatre.org

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