

NETWORKING

The Newsletter of the Network Theatre Company

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

WWW.NETWORKTHEATRE.ORG



Summer 08

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Dear Network members,

It is with huge sadness that we must announce the loss of our great friend and Chairman, David Murray, who passed away on Saturday 9th August. Our thoughts and sympathy are obviously with Kay right now. David will be sorely missed by all for his warm, witty, friendly, generous and jolly loveliness. He was the life and soul of the Network Theatre and did so much for the place itself as well as its members. It goes without saying that it won't be the same without him and we have a huge gap to fill in the running of the theatre itself as David personally did so much for the upkeep and management of our space under the arch.

The AGM on 12th August was short, sweet and sorrowful - a little strange and sad, to say the least, without Kay and David. It was agreed that the existing committee members will continue in their roles with the addition of Keith Wait. Welcome on board Keith. Nigel Williams will be 'acting Chairman' until a new Chairman is appointed in accordance with the constitution. The committee will need restructuring in terms of assigning roles and responsibilities, which fell so heavily upon David and need to be shared amongst the team. We are looking at sprucing up the place as planned - replacing the floor in the Green Room, investing in an improved stage itself and clearing out the back arch. The comments made by members and other visitors regarding our website have been noted for action. We welcome feedback on any improvements you believe could be made- please write to newsletter@networktheatre.org

We were looking to publish a picture of David here on the front cover of the newsletter and were scratching around for the perfect snap, but of course David doesn't appear in many photos as he was always up a ladder or in the box or upside down drilling something. Doesn't that say a lot about the man we knew and loved? Oh Mr. Murray! Kay will be putting something together for us to remember him by in the next newsletter.

So now it's our turn to give something back. We need to keep Network Theatre alive and afloat so without further ado, here is your Summer edition of Networking- our first on-line environmentally friendly edition. We have news and reviews of Humble Boy and Iff. Well done to all cast and crew involved in both shows.

We are also in the midst of building a programme for 2009 (our 70th anniversary) and have a few available slots so if you fancy a stab at directing or have a show in mind that you would love to see performed at Network Theatre, please write in to us. The more variety, the better.

Take care,

The Editor

All submissions are welcome.

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Humble Boy by Charlotte Jones

A Review by Kirsty Eyre

Sunhats off to the cast and crew of Humble Boy, who brought to life Charlotte Jones's exceptionally brilliant play- now here's a script to aspire to! For this blend of cleverly crafted dynamic dialogue, twists and turns and bitter-sweet comic precision ticks every box. No wonder it won a hat trick of awards (Susan Smith Blackburn Award 2001, the Critics' Circle Best New Play Award 2002, and the People's Choice Best New Play Award 2002) and no wonder Jennie Rich chose to direct this at Network. Top choice!

Let me set the scene... something that Helen Mason and Alan Scott (Set Design) did a jaw-dropping outstanding job of. Their kaleidoscope of floral colours surrounding the on-stage lawn brought to life the Humble's garden, in which the entire show plays out. Instead of making a beeline for the bar, the audience could be found hovering in a swarm in the auditorium, admiring the thoughtful (from hosepipe to honeycomb) eye-catching set.



Gary Cross's beehive and Alan's decking patio were the icing on the cake. The set really was a piece of art in itself.

And then the show began!

Paul D'Orley contemplates life as James in Humble Boy

Stumbling, stuttering Felix Humble (Andy Barrett), the aspiring astro-physicist, returns home for his father's funeral. His self-obsessed and overpowering Mother, Flora (Helen Mason) doesn't give him or his theories the time of day. In her words, she has been "doubly unlucky in life. To marry a biologist and give birth to a physicist." Whilst Felix struggles to come to terms with bereavement, Flora has already removed all traces of his father's existence from their home, including his beloved bees and has a 'new' man in her life- George Pye (Kevin Heady). George happens to be the father of Rosie (Alison Rycroft), who was heartlessly jilted by Felix six years ago. Desperately dowdy Mercy (Samantha Bullock) does her best to stick up for Felix but bows to the forcefulness of Flora. It is only James (Paul D'Orley), a ghostly gardener, who truly understands. James is the only one with all the time in the world for Felix and his physics and is only too happy to sit and listen. A dinner party unravels a series of secrets. Felix has to get his head around a whole host of extracurricular discoveries: George Pye has in fact been his Mother's lover for years before his father's death. Not only that but it is revealed that Felix is the father of Rosie's child... something which, with the imminent marriage of George and Flora, contorts and distorts the family tree on both sides. The final twist being that the apparition of James is actually Felix seeing his late father- something that Flora can only see once she is presented with the ultimate symbol of devotion from her late husband- a new species of bee named after her.

Hamletesque? Definitely, but more. My whistle-stop synopsis doesn't do justice to the sub-plots, humour and depth of characters. One noticeable trait of Humble Boy and its performance on the Network stage is that each character gets their moment of glory. A perfect example is that of Mercy. Samantha Bullock's portrayal of Mercy as the mild mannered do-gooder was a pleasure to watch as she rose to Flora's bait and under the guise of grace finally gave a piece of her mind. Layer upon layer of pent up frustration started to trickle, flow and finally gush out as an unexpected torrent of emotion. By Amen, this wallflower was in full bloom amongst the most deserved audience applause.

Andy Barrett, in my humble opinion, delivered a b,b,b brilliant performance of Felix. Dressed in his cricketing whites, he was the perfect bumbling humble boy and looked suitably petrified by the two domineering women in his life- his Mother and her verbal onslaught and Rosie with her sexual one! Andy succeeded in capturing both the inhibited son, regressing in the presence of his overbearing Mother and the passionate physicist.

Helen Mason meanwhile had the enviable role of Flora, the super bitch with a new outfit for every mood swing. This botanical beauty is Venus Flytrap on Red Bull with a put down for every pick up. After all, *the last word is her prerogative*. Helen's Flora made Hyacinth Bouquet look like a shrinking violet. She and her Pimms looked perfectly at home on the sun-lounger as she taunted all the others in one way or another. I kept expecting her to appear with a bee-hive hair do as she buzzed between her victims. And whilst Flora preened, James pruned. Paul D'Orley, his wellies and poised secateurs were perfectly cast as James, who displayed just the right demeanour to weed the Eureka moment out of Felix with his gentle probing, sympathetic smile and generous ears- although maybe a little too softly spoken at times as I struggled to hear in parts. And whilst James pushed up daisies, his 'in yer face' antagonist, George, completed the love triangle. Kevin Heady's performance as George didn't half make me chuckle. He delivered his 'buggers' and 'bloodies' with gusto! This, combined with the lunacy of his drunk dancing lifted the comedy element- this was crass class.

The hidden gem though, has to be Rosie Pye played by Alison Rycroft. For Rosie says it like it is and we love her for it. And Alison? Well, she *was* Rosie. Here is an actress with a natural gift, making every Rosie real- a delight to watch. Alison for me was man of the match. Hopefully we will see more of her in future shows.

This was a great show, which wholeheartedly deserved sell-out audiences. Both cast and crew should be proud. My only criticism was in the blocking of characters on set, who at times appeared like 'pretty maids all in a row' when that isn't how a garden grows. The three characters looked unnaturally staged as they spoke across each other in a line and there were a couple of performances, which were maybe too out to the audience. Congratulations to the highly focussed Jennie Rich, Director, and Hannah Few, devoted Assistant Director for pulling off this masterpiece with the help of the stalwart crew comprising the bubbly Imelda Maguire, Stage Manager, the ever faithful Eshani Weeresinghe, Assistant Stage Manager, the illuminating David Murray, Lighting Designer/Operator and the tuneful Nigel Oatway, Sound Operator.

Dates for your Diary	
Reading of The Three Musketeers	7pm, 18 th September
Auditions for The Three Musketeers	6.30pm, 23 rd & 25 th September
Re	7.30pm, Weds 1 st – Sat 4 th October
Reading of March 2009's production	7pm, 20 th November
Auditions for March 2009's production	6.30pm, 25 th and 27 th November
Performances of The Three Musketeers	7.30pm, Weds 10 th – Sat 13 th December
Christmas Party!	7.30pm, 19 th December

More about our New Year's schedule in the next newsletter!

New Ticket Price Scheme

After keeping ticket prices at £8 for some considerable time, we have had to increase ticket prices to £10, but there is now **no** additional booking fee for buying online with a credit or debit card from www.ticketsource.co.uk/networktheatre. Tickets will also be £10 at the door, but if members buy in advance via the cast or crew, direct from Nigel Oatway our box office manager, tickets are available at a discounted price of £9. Please note that the discounted rate for Lambeth & Southwark residents has had to be dropped.

iff by Andrew.N.Hill
A review by Deb Dowdall



Michael Mayne plays Federal Agent Jackson whilst
Andy Bradshaw plays Alan Peterson, the writer, in Iff.

It is great to see new works and really encouraging that NTC are now performing an increasing number of these.

Iff by Andrew N. Hill is an imaginative and interesting play that explores the nature of reality, and the reality of fiction, the nature of fantasy, the powers and responsibilities of the author and the existence of a Creator. It does so, traditionally, by focusing on a scriptwriter (write about what you know), in the context of an Aykourn-like domestic drama, together with a few short summaries of philosophical arguments for the existence of God. This makes it quite a challenging work to stage and perform. It requires the different acting styles of an American Police procedural, a modern British drawing room comedy, and ultimately surrealist drama.

It entwines the story of scriptwriter Alan Paterson (Andy Bradshaw) with his TV pilot set in the NYPD Drug Squad. To his alarm, having killed off his heroine Gemma Hale (Emily Godowski) - or at least left her in a coma- she appears at his door in the flesh, and angry with him for the lousy state of the world he has created. His wife Olivia (Sharan Hunjan) is convinced he is having a breakdown.

The confines of Network Theatre are a little limiting for special effects, but the production managed to suspend my disbelief as the action moved from a flat in Hampstead to a New York drugs bust and back. The cast also managed convincing American accents where necessary. Andy Bradshaw, Emily Godowski and Sharan Hunjan were engaging in a rather complex romantic triangle. The device of having Gemma's children as silent and invisible participants in dialogue worked very well too – avoiding the perils of a Joyce Grenfell monologue.

If I have any criticism of the show, it would be that the script tried to cover too much. It had three different stories, – Alan's own story, his fictional script, and the real-life of a NYPD officer – and at least two philosophical arguments – the nature of creative writing, and the nature of creation. As a result the supporting characters; NYPD trio- Federal Agent Jackson (Michael Mayne), Harvey Cooper (David Fraser) and Mark Tranchard (Alex Raskovic), Gemma's sister Mandy (Imelda Maguire), Gemma's partner John Sinclair (Andrew Mell) and Officer Jacobs and the hospital doctor (both played by Judith Denwood) were clearly in place to move the plot along. Their characterisation and stories had no time to develop, being mentioned rather arbitrarily by other characters, then passed on – the state of Jim and Julia (played by Robin Lansman and Ursula Smyth)'s marriage described but not performed; Captain Cooper's long-standing lack of girlfriend mentioned only to be resolved. I look forward to the appearance of *Drug Squad- the TV series* where all these imagined characters and stories can be fully explored.