

Network Theatre, 246A Lower Road, Waterloo, London SE1 8SF
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HAPPY CHUFFING CHRISTMAS



Left: Judith Denwood as Grandma Calypso,
Right: Alison Rycroft as Our Julie, Fleur de Henrie as Our Adele and Charlie Edwards as Our Ross
Photographs by Paul H Lunnon

Welcome to the December and Christmas edition of Networking!

This edition concludes 2009, which has been a very successful milestone for Network Theatre with some great shows wrapped around its 70th anniversary at Waterloo.

You no doubt know that our Christmas Party is now on Friday 15th January- which should give everyone a bit more time to get their glad rags on and work off a few mince pies on the dance floor!

So, quite aptly, may I take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy Chuffing Christmas. A massive Thank You to all those who supported the finale production of 2009, making it the biggest Box Office smash Network has had to date. I am very proud of the cast and crew, who did a cracking job. Let me tell you Barnsley has got Talent.

Happy reading, Merry Christmas and all the best for a splendid start to 2010,
Kirsty, The Editor

All submissions are welcome.

Please send to the editor at newsletter@networktheatre.org.

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HAPPY CHUFFING CHRISTMAS

By Kirsty Eyre

A Review by Poison Ink



The Warburton Family celebrate Christmas day in Barnsley

Photograph by Paul H Lunnon

Now on to her eighth stage show, Kirsty Eyre's *Happy Chuffing Christmas* is a confidently written comedy of dysfunctional family life, executed with gusto by a strong ensemble cast.

The story centres around the Warburton household in Barnsley, where four generations conspire to infuriate and disappoint each other but who, when push comes to shove, are united by deep affection and seldom-voiced love for one another.

At the top of the tree is Great Grandma Iris, played by Network stalwart Kay Murray, whose deft comic timing (a la Liz Smith) ensured plenty of belly laughs. Her "t'int in tin", and penchant for hoarding food delivered two of the big laughs of the night. Grandma Calypso (Judith Denwood) also had some choice lines as she surveyed the wreckage wrought on her family by the love-hate relationship between her daughter Athena (Lesley Winterflood) and her other-half, Aidan (Andy Bradshaw).



Aidan is convincingly loutish and Athena spirited but long put-upon and their prickly relationship was well rendered by the two. Winterflood's first appearance on stage, in an eye-popping sparkly leotard, will live long in the memory and immediately got the audience onside. That is perhaps the show's greatest strength – there was a feel-good factor to the production that quickly won over the crowd and kept them there for the duration.

Underpinning the story is the effect of the Warburton's often unhappy partnership on their three children—the good natured, if not intellectually blessed, Nick (a suitably understated Roger Kennedy); frustrated Adele (Fleur de Henri); and high-achieving little brother, Ross (Charlie Edwards). All three delivered nicely nuanced performances, and special mention should go to Charlie, who is himself still a teen but who confidently held his own among his (slightly!) older fellow cast members.

Life for the Warburtons is turned completely on its head with the arrival of a foreign exchange student (taken on for the bit of extra cash the school will provide for her upkeep). Letizia is an exotic girl from Naples who quickly bewitches the majority of the malefolk she encounters, but who is troubled by the secrets she holds (played by Irene Fumagalli with a good deal of sensitivity).

Kay Murray as Great Grandma Iris asks you to spare her a thought whilst you're all mid-linguini

But as previously mentioned, this is a genuine ensemble piece. While the core characters were well defined and believable, they were supported by additional performances that added real colour.

There was the brash, rude and slightly crazed Auntie Electra, showcasing the talents of Jennie Rich in a whole new way!

Alison Rycroft was hilarious as Julie, the chip-munching, love-lorn best friend of Adele. The object of her teen lust was cheeky chappy Darren (possibly Barnsley's answer to Darren Day...) played by Adam Simcox, who struck a well-judged balance between likeability and macho pratt-dom. Simcox also had the opportunity to display his skills as a film-maker, with a short film at the start of the second half, shot in atmospheric black and white on location in Barnsley. Such an unexpected bit of "multimedia" could easily have jolted but the film was warm and funny and instead managed to add extra layers to proceedings. A special mention for the characterful performance given by one unwitting Barnsley citizen, Woman in Market.



The Warburtons (Charlie Edwards, Roger Kennedy and Andy Bradshaw) enter Barnsley's got Talent.
Photographs by Paul H Lunnon

There were also sterling performances from Sophie Darley as the Madame Arcarti of the North, whose self-trained spiritualist had some of the best lines of the night. Christina Houghton hammed it up as the overwrought exchange organiser, Miss Cassini, and Silvia Calabrese carved through the latter stages of the play like a hurricane as the irate mother of Letizia.

Thanks in no small part to the recent refurbishment of one prominent Networker's kitchen, the stage set effectively evoked the sense of an over-crowded and suffocating domestic space, while the backstage crew, as ever, did a fine job with lighting and sound. Marita Ri came up with a wardrobe that consistently reflected the characters that wore the costumes, and she even made a cameo appearance herself.

So all in all, Eyre has crafted a clever piece of theatre that plays for laughs but remembers that you also need a strong story (which it is bar one slightly unconvincing case of mistaken identity) and characters that the audience actually care about. There are echoes of the Royle Family, Victoria Wood, even Coronation Street, but there is enough good writing to raise it above simple pastiche. This is a Chuffing good Christmas show with lots of heart.

COMING SOON...

MORE OPPORTUNITIES AT NETWORK IN 2010

Dates are currently being arranged for more readings, auditions, shows and read throughs for fun. Watch this space – more in the January 2010 edition.