

NETWORKING

The Newsletter of the Network Theatre Company

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

WWW.NETWORKTHEATRE.ORG



Autumn/ Winter Edition

November 07

THE KITCHEN: A culinary delight worthy of a galaxy of Michelin stars



Lunch-break time at **The Kitchen**

Dear Networkers,

Welcome to the Winter edition of Networking.

It's time to get stuck in to 2008.. so whether you're a seamstress, a foxstress, a stage hand from Crewe, an actor from Acton wandering Waterloo- get involved at Network Theatre... On that note we are looking for **NEW DIRECTORS** to direct a handful of vignettes (monologues, short plays), which run under the umbrella title of **Opposites Attract** from 1st – 4th October at Network Theatre. This is perfect for budding directors who would prefer to start with something bite-sized. See back page for more on this.

Congratulations to Michael Mayne and his cast and crew on a crème de la crème production of The Kitchen shortly before Christmas. Mark Aspen's rave review is in this edition.

On that note, we are always happy to hear from new reviewers (I'm sure Mark is due a holiday this year!). Anyone interested in reviewing productions, please get in touch → newsletter@networktheatre.org

Our next show at Network will be The Suburban Spaceman- a musical adventure to planet Billabop interwoven with a parody of corporate life. Have you bought your tickets yet? We're guaranteeing fun from 12- 16th February and have added a matinee performance on Saturday 16th at 3pm. Suitable for adults and children.

Enjoy,
The Editor

All submissions are welcome.

Please send to the editor at newsletter@networktheatre.org. © 2008 Network Theatre Company.

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Network Theatre Company, its committee or its members.

A review by Mark Aspen of Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen*

The Network Theatre's serving of Sir Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen*, in its frantically frenetic feeding frenzy, proves that fast food can provide a gourmet meal.

Director Michael Mayne deserves a galaxy of Michelin stars for even considering mounting on the Network Theatre's modest stage a play that demands getting on for three dozen actors and the whole of the kitchens of a London hotel's *Tivoli* restaurant as a set. What could have been a culinary disaster was handled with all the ease of a seasoned chef whipping up a fine béchamel sauce. In spite of the high tempo, with techniques such as freeze frame and miming (thankfully all food was mimed!), and a skilful use of the forestage, Michael overcame the classical director's problems of many actors on stage and (horror!) tables for them to get stuck behind.

Gary Cross's black and white set, complete with hot-wire sculpted props such as the period sink and old-style fridge, provided the place setting, which, enhanced by Sarah Yeoh's lighting, gave a stylish presentation. Helen Mason's costumes, again black and white, neatly complemented the design.

From its lightning larders to its scurrying scullery the *Tivoli* has cantering catering. Its chefs and cooks, waitress and washers-up rush to and fro and cannot spare time to understand the cultures, emotions, alliances and antagonisms that unite or divide them.

The plot is served in three courses. The hors-d'oeuvre is the arrival of the staff and the relentless build up to the hectic lunchtime frenzy as orders pour in from the restaurant faster than they can be dealt with. (The seven waitresses seemed like seventy as the well choreographed ebb and flow of actors built up to a flood. This was a feast for the overworked eyes of the audience, enough for any thespio-glutton.) Demeter the washer-up, richly played by Jennie Rich, comments from her scullery on the "United Nations" present in the turbulent kitchen. We meet Raymond the Italian pastry chef (Andy Barrett) and the Irish sous-chef Kevin, a newcomer (a chirpy Sean McMullan). Peter, the German fish cook, played by Mike Wyer with the ebullience of a bouillabaisse, and his over-*duzen*-ing compatriot Hans (Koen De Rijcke). With the constant stirring of Max, a belligerent xenophobe, robustly portrayed by Rupert Littlewood, and the readiness of Peter and Gaston (Alex Raskovič) to trade punches, here is a pot ready to boil over.

The main course is a little smoother and simmers lyrically as the kitchen staff and chefs linger during the afternoon lull. We learn more about the irascible Peter, self-suffering and short-fused, and his love affair with a married waitress, Monique. Eilidh Nairn brought out Monique's frustration as she swings from perkiness to petulance. Peter is jealous and argumentative, and for better or worse, he is the catalyst that brings out the dreams of his co-workers, dreams of insecurity, of women, of better times that might be or might have been. A Jewish cook's deep-rooted hatred of a selfish neighbour emerges. The political nightmare of the introspective Paul (Gareth Derrig) perhaps expresses the Jewish trauma of Wesker (who worked in the kitchens at The Bell Hotel in Norwich), although Monique's lurid dream of an abattoir proves to be the most prophetic as the plot develops.

The desert course returns to an active period again with the kitchen coming back the boil for dinner service again during evening. Sweetness cloys and flirting turns to fighting. The tittle-tattle of all the waitresses, from civilised Violet (Susan Morley) to caustic Cynthia (Helen Mason) keeps up the steam. A saucepan figuratively burns as poor put-upon Winnie (skilfully played by Suzy de Lezameta) collapses with a suspected miscarriage. Then the pot really boils over as Peter is in the end ditched by Monique, goes berserk and, defeated in his own passion, smashes up the kitchen.

Enter God, in the form of Marango, the proprietor, bewildered by Peter's violence, who asks his workers, what more is there to life than work, money and food? "You stopped my whole world," he whimpers. Terry Wynne showed us a man totally absorbed in his own world, yet desperately embattled by his bustling workforce. Marango's ministers are his managers, who bring the world back to order, the head Chef himself, who denigrates as he delegates. David Massingham's towering presence underlined the limitations of his power.

The real control is at the next level, where deputy head chef, old Frank is the kitchen's kin-pin. Barry Clarke gave a consummate portrait of the humanity of this man. This was reflected in the versatile Rosie de Vekey's Bertha, the vegetable cook, a beautifully unsophisticated Cockney, telling it as it is.

We must taste what life serves up, with its confusions and its clatterings. Michael Mayne has captured the flavour of the kitchen, a microcosmic ragout of mankind's fancies and follies, and given us a galloping gourmet gustation. And, oh ... you must never forget that if you can't stand the heat, then get out of the kitchen.

Bazaar & Rummage by Sue Townsend

Performances: Weds 2nd- Sat 5th April

Synopsis: Gwenda leads a self-help group of agoraphobics who have been unable to leave their homes for various reasons. An ex-agoraphobic herself, Gwenda decides the perfect way to help overcome their fears is to involve them in a bazaar and rummage sale at the local church hall. With the help of trainee social worker Fliss, they tackle the first obstacle – getting there – only to be faced later on with the horrifying prospect of going home.

CAST LIST

Gwenda	Kimberly Bradshaw
Fliss	Eilidh Nairn
Katrina	JoJo Micalcuff
Bell-Bell	Helen Mason
Margaret	Helen Manders
WPC	Su Vigus

An Interview with Mary Alice Stack, Director

1. Adrian Mole often springs to mind when Sue Townsend's name gets a mention but as well as her best selling diarist success, she has written a wide range of stage, screen and radio plays. So why Bazaar and Rummage?

The Diary of Adrian Mole was massively popular when I was a teenager, so Sue Townsend's name was very familiar to me. But, to be honest, I had no idea that she'd written any plays until someone suggested that I read Bazaar and Rummage as a possible directing option for Network. You don't have to get very far into the play to realise what a great comedy writer she is, and it didn't take long to decide that this was a play I'd love to direct.

2. I believe this play was originally set during the early eighties (it was put on in the Royal Court Theatre in 1982). Have you stuck to this period or are you going for a 21st century feel?

Originally, I was considering bringing the play up to date by giving it a more contemporary slant. However, a lot of the text is quite specific to the 80s and I could see that if we updated it we would risk losing some of the detail and subtlety of the writing, which is very much a product of its time. Also, by keeping it set in the 80s, a whole new layer of comedy starts emerging for today's audiences - from the fashion to the startlingly un-PC comments!

3. Whilst B&R is a notoriously entertaining play, it also tackles a number of issues- one being agoraphobia. From a Director's point of view how are you finding the balance?

As a director, I enjoy exploring the circumstances and situations that bring a set of characters together in a play. Bazaar and Rummage brings together a fascinating set of characters who, for different reasons, are suffering from a condition which in some way is crippling their lives. Much of this is the basis for the comedy but it also means that the actors have to work hard to understand how and why their respective characters are like this, to make them believable. It's quite a challenge for me and the actors, but at least it makes for interesting rehearsals!

4. So, rehearsals are underway, you're fully cast...do you need a hand with anything else (props, crew etc)?

The play takes place in a church hall so we have a pretty simple set to build. However, if anyone would like to help with painting and set dressing over our get-in weekend that would be much appreciated! We are also looking for some specific props: a 3ft high crucifix (with body); a hula hoop; an Elvis Presley mirror; musical instruments; binoculars; children's toys, copies of Black Beauty and Dr Zhivago and various books, plus other bits and bobs. If any one has these or any late 70s and early 80s fashion items lurking in a dark corner, please let us know...

5. You mentioned (tongue in cheek) the possibility of having a jumble sale as part of the after show party...

Yes! I'm told that storage space is limited in the arch, and so we'll almost certainly have to try and off load much of the rummage collected for the show. No better time to do this than the after show party! Not exactly rummage, but I think that we'll also have an out of tune piano, which we'll need to find a home for ... anyone interested?

6. Are you going with or without the optional musical score?

The music for the original production was never published with the play, and so we've jumped on the opportunity to write our own songs – thanks to the considerable talents of our Musical Director, Su Vigus. Su is writing all of the music and is doubling up as the WPC who puts in an appearance at the end of ACT II. Busy lady!

7. What are the main challenges for you as a Director putting this show on at Network Theatre?

It's always hard getting to grips with any production with so many things to consider and co-ordinate. Having said that, I have been given very good support by Nigel Williams and the committee who have made me feel at home. I'm really pleased to have been in Abigail's Party last year, so at least I am familiar with the space as an actor.

A synopsis of Set Menu by Deborah Heath

Reading: 28th February 2008

Doors open at 6.30pm, Reading starts at 7pm

Set Menu, as its name suggests, is set in a restaurant over the course of one evening. The play has 9 characters but can be performed by 7 actors if two sets double. Whilst both acts cover the same time period, the first act explores what happens outside the restaurant, whilst the second reveals what takes place inside...

Caroline has been stood up by her boyfriend and whilst waiting outside gets chatting to Lewis, the doorman, actually an Oxford graduate friend of Simon, the waiter. Through their conversation we meet Callum & Georgina – out for birthday dinner- and Andy & Brie, on their way to the theatre and Ian the eccentric food critic. Callum reveals he has bought the restaurant for Georgina as a surprise, which infuriates her, as he hasn't discussed it with her – and she thought he'd been having an affair!

The action takes place against the backdrop of a hen party from which we hear occasional bouts of noise and laughter. Siobhan, the Hen night organiser tries to flirt with our beleaguered waiter, Simon. Callum despairs as Georgina disappears to consider whether their relationship has a future, whilst Lewis and Caroline come into the restaurant for dinner – perhaps the start of a new relationship?

A synopsis of Opposites Attract by Bruce Kane

"Opposites Attract" consists 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 of the 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. For more details please visit → <http://www.kaneprod.com/plays/plays.htm>

Dates for your Diary	
The Suburban Spaceman performances	7.30pm Tues 12 th – Sat 16 th February + 3pm Matinee on Sat 16 th February
Reading of Set Menu	6.30pm for 7pm, 28 th February
Reading of The Humble Boy	7pm, 6 th March
Auditions for The Humble Boy	6.30pm, 11 th and 13 th March
Bazaar and Rummage performances	7.30pm Weds 2 nd – Sat 5 th 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
Performances of Iff	7.30pm Weds 23 rd - Sat 26 th July
Performances of Plague: The Musical (non Network Production, which will go on to run at the Edinburgh Fringe 08. For more info, please visit www.plaguethemusical.com)	7.30pm Weds 6 th - Fri 8 th August
Reading of Opposites Attract	TBD
Auditions for Opposites Attract	TBD
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

News Flash....

- The Suburban Spaceman has an additional Matinee performance at 3pm on Saturday 16th Feb!
- Visit <http://www.kaneprod.com/plays/plays.htm> for a look at the plays on offer in Opposites Attract. Please contact newsletter@networktheatre.org if you are interested in directing.
- Barry Clarke has kindly published lots of photos of The Kitchen on Facebook.