

# Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

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**March 2011**

Dear Networkers,

Spring is in the air and with the renewed energy that comes with it, it's never been a better time to get involved in a new production - or start working on your own project!

Well you're spoilt for choice with Network.

You could choose to audition for Andy Bradshaw's production of Romeo and Juliet, at the end of the month (see p. 6) or submit a play you would like to direct in 2012 (see p. 3).

Or, if this sounds like too much hard work, then just come to one of our social evenings, or to the Road performances in April (interview with the Director p. 5).

Our Theatre Company aims to be a community before anything else, so please do not hesitate to contact us if you have an idea for a social evening (a reading you would like to organise, for example), if you would like to help with the Front Of House during shows (we're always very grateful for volunteers, plus you get to see the show for free!), have skills you think could help in a production (DIY kings and queens, anyone?) or anything else you might want to share with us - we're all ears on [news@networktheatre.org](mailto:news@networktheatre.org)

All the best,

**Rosie de Vekey & Gaelle Comte**  
Editors

## **In this issue:**

**Review of Revenge of the Amazons** p. 2  
By Katherine Hayes

**Plays for 2012** p. 3  
By Nigel Williams

**Network: a Wider Theatre** p. 3  
By Keith Waite

**Interview of James McKendrick, Director of Road** p. 5  
By Rosie de Vekey

**Network at Large** p. 5  
By Rosie de Vekey  
Coming up in 2011 p. 6



# Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

## Revenge of the Amazons - Review

By Katherine Hayes

Mixing feminism and fun, *Revenge of the Amazons* is Jean Betts reworking of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Whilst keeping the original structure of the play, an exploration of the more indulgent side of women's groups is used to direct the action and create the comedy.

The first act opens with a power reversal.

It is Hippolyta (Emma Byrne), Queen of the Amazons, that has indulged a suitably wimpy Theseus (Nick Lebret) with a temporary return to earth to preside over the trouble Egeus (Paul D'Orley) is having with his daughter Hermia (Lauren Edwards).

Hippolyta is gradually educated about the lower status of women in this world and then the action follows Hermia and Lysander as they run away pursued by Demetrius and Helena.

They are subsequently bewitched by Puck and Titania (Lesley Winterflood).

Meanwhile the Fallopian Thespians, the players who will entertain Theseus and Hippolyta, are devising a work that will educate about the oppression of women. It is here that Brett pokes affectionate fun at all things associated with the 'sisterhood'. The Players all decide to collaborate together but with mixed results. They refuse to have a director, as that is

oppressive and linked to patriarchy.

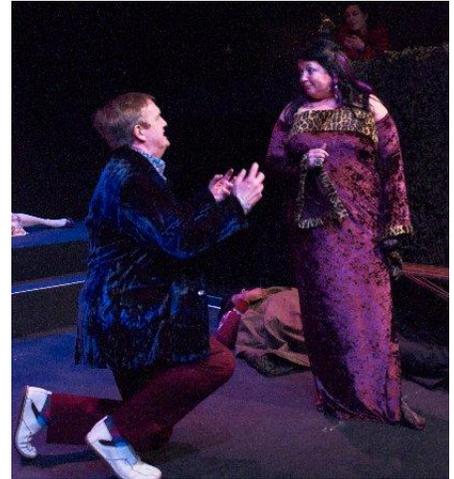
Because they cannot co-operate, they cannot get on, and it is left to Georgina (Sue Small) to persuade them into improvising a series of scenes, which they rehearse at night. It is at this point that Barbara, a thespian, is

bewitched by the fairies and turned into a bunny girl for the delight of a suitably lecherous Oberon played by Chris Watkins.

There were some good performances here: Lucy Dobson as Peaseblossom and Suzy de Lezameta as Puck work well as lead fairies.

Much more could have been made of the physicality of the brawl between Lysander and Demetrius as they claim love for Helena (Amy Barker) and despise Hermia. It is possible to cover great distances with this fight, and Network has quite a space to work with. It felt a little at times there was lots of empty stage covered in theatre blacks despite a large cast. Fairies hid in the corners of the stage watching the action, however to get more momentum of the enchanted world more use could have been made of these cast members.

The Hermia and Helena conundrum was well sparred, but more voice projection is needed, and a little more thought to the costumes for some of the leading characters.



*Oberon and his Titania*  
Photograph by Paul Lunnon



*Hermia, Helena and the Queen*  
Photograph by Paul Lunnon

# Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

## Plays for 2012 - Directors with ideas wanted!

By Nigel Williams

It is time to start thinking about the plays for next year so if you have an idea and would like to direct please contact me at [plays@networktheatre.org](mailto:plays@networktheatre.org).

Remember:



It would be nice to continue the practice of including one piece of new work so do not be afraid to submit that opus you have been working on. You may not want to direct it yourself but don't worry about that.

If want to talk about the whole process before proposing something I will be happy to help - just get in touch.

## Network: a Wider Theatre

By Keith Wait

Visiting companies have for many years been an essential part of Network's stated aim to give a wide theatre experience to its members, whilst providing a fruitful framework of mutual support.

Hence, we are trying to encourage our members to come along to see visiting companies' shows, and equally we are welcoming visiting companies and their associates to Network's in-house productions.

Many Network members are missing good opportunities to see even more great shows in our own theatre. Details of visiting companies' shows are on our website, under "What's On". So please make full use of our website, which is yours too!

For music fans, Network has been running a series called Music Mondays. On the first Monday of each month we are welcoming a visiting music group.

Watch the website for the April and May gigs, but from the June slot (actually Bank Holiday Monday 30<sup>th</sup> May), Eddie Provost is lining up internationally well known saxophonists for a series with the series (v. separate article).

On the drama front, we are welcoming 3P Entertainment's production of *Stockholm* over the Easter period (see article p.8), and the acclaimed *Sturdy Beggars* are returning in May. Their production of *Princess Ivona* at Network in January resulted five star reviews in the National press.

If you would like to be part of the Network team welcoming visitors, we are always looking for people to help out on the bar: great fun... and you get chance to see the show. Just e-mail the Committee at [info@networktheatre.org](mailto:info@networktheatre.org)

# Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

## Interview of James McKendrick, Director of Road

By Rosie de Vekey

### What is Road about?

How long have you got? Ostensibly, it's a fly on the wall look at a community in Lancashire living through the de-industrialisation and mass unemployment that hit major cities throughout the UK during the 70s and early 80s. However, trying to sum the play up in a few sentences can make it sound a bit "It's Grim Up North", which wouldn't begin to do it justice.

Granted, it concerns people living in desperate circumstances, but many of them deal with that through humour or grabbing whatever small pleasures they can. In that respect it transcends the time and place it is set in and, to me, seems to be concerned with the struggle to find a point to an existence devoid of one.

### Have you updated it?

Given that the play addresses themes of unemployment and people coping with the consequences of massive social and economic change, there is certainly potential for updating, but I think that would be to miss the point. There was a lot of agit-prop theatre around in the 80s, some of which now seems quite dated. I think one of the reasons "Road" has endured better than many works from that era is that it possesses a timeless quality.

There is only one reference to it being set in 1987 and virtually no direct political references.

Although no-one could be in any doubt as to where Jim Cartwright's sympathies lie, he

doesn't force feed a political point of view. Rather he lets the characters speak for themselves and allows the audience to draw their own conclusions. Therefore, although I've kept 1987 as the setting, it could just as easily be any time over the last thirty years. To me, the point seems to be that those recessions and booms come and go, but for some people, things never get any better.

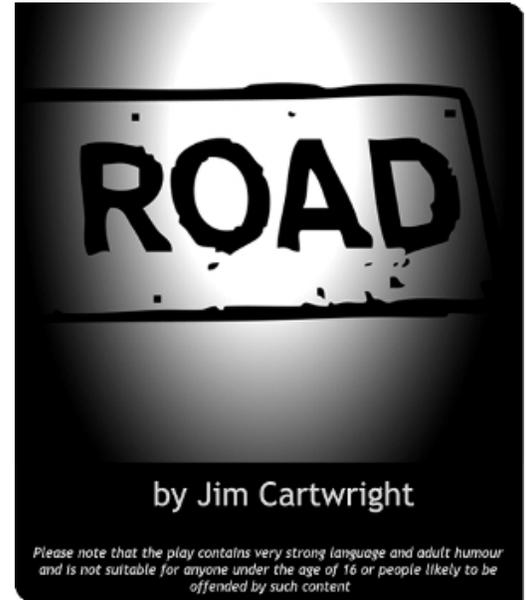
### What are the challenges of the show?

There are a number of technical challenges to how I want to present the show, but I am fortunate to have a great crew in David Harvey, Dan Young and Emma Byrne, who have offered invaluable advice on how we can make the technical aspects work. David has also produced a fantastic set design that offers several options for staging.

The biggest challenge is doing justice to the writing. Much of it sounds very realistic, but the more you explore it, the more subtleties and ambiguities you discover, which offers any number of ways that you could come at a character or scene. However, it's that sort of challenge that makes people want to act or direct, so it's all good.

### How are the rehearsals going?

I'm really pleased with how rehearsals are progressing. I took the approach of asking the cast to find their own way into character and to run with their own ideas initially and have been



constantly amazed and amused by what they have come up with. There are a number of logistical challenges to directing a large cast show and, in addition, a lot of scenes are quite self-contained. Now that we're at the stage of being able to run an act, it seems to have given everyone a lift, as it's much clearer how the whole thing fits together.

### Who are your cast?

I'm still pinching myself a bit at the strength of the cast we've got, which is composed almost evenly between actors known to Network and those making their debut with the company. In the former category are: Julian Farrance, Steve Simler, Sacha Walker, Judith Denwood, Keith Wait, Irene Fumagali, Paul D'Orley, Laura Blundell, Lauren Edwards, Emily Carmichael and James Daybell. I think it's fair to say, though, that most will be

# Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

giving quite different performances from what they have done at Network previously. Those making the first of what I am sure will be many appearances at Network are: Clare Joseph, Stephen Lee, Vicky Simler, Nick Stafford, Annie Greenslade, Gary Nunn, Jo Nash, Chris Pethers and Lucien Campbell. Another new arrival is Sharon Trotter who is AD.

## Is there anything you need help with?

There are a few items which we are exploring options for, so if anyone has access to either a supermarket shopping trolley or an authentic road sign, then that would save us a lot of time. However, we would need to wreck the road sign, so unless it's

something that you're content never to see again, I wouldn't volunteer it. If anyone has a pool/snooker cue and a dart board and darts that we could make use of, those would also be very welcome. Apart from that, I think we've got most things we need.

## What can we expect from the show?

I hope quite a few surprises and that, for better or worse, people will leave thinking "Well, I wasn't expecting that!" Which, I suppose, is to say that I'm giving nothing away.

**'This truly theatrical piece of work takes the audience by the throat and doesn't let go until**

**their teeth rattle' - tell us more...**

I probably gave a bit of a hostage to fortune with that line. I was referring to the play itself, as I don't think this production can make that sort of claim before it has even been performed; when it has, then we can check the dental well-being of the audience. However, the writing is so strong that it leaps off the page and, even on first reading, it has a very visual quality to it, offering scenes and scenarios that could only work in the theatre. It is uncompromising in every sense and, if we get it right, I hope that it will be entertaining but also thought provoking and memorable. Any gripping by the throat will, however, be purely metaphorical.

Road is on at Network Theatre from 13 to 16 April 2011 - tickets now on sale.

## Network at Large

By Rosie de Vekey

*A Long Night in London* by Bernie Byrnes, first performed at Network in 2010, enjoyed a successful run at the Oxford House Theatre, Bethnal Green. *A Long Night in London* tells the story of the Bethnal Green Tube Shelter Disaster, which was the deadliest civilian incident of World War 2. Bernie's poignant piece is thought-provoking, moving and powerful without being gratuitous and I hope it has another opportunity to tell the story of the victims and survivors.

To support the Stairway to Heaven Memorial charity, please visit <http://www.stairwaytoheavenmemorial.org/>

# Networking

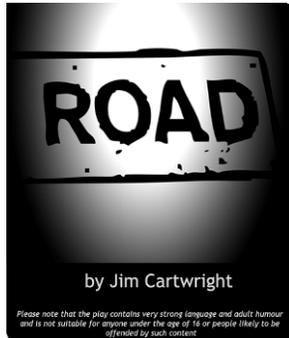
Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

## COMING UP IN 2011

### Network Theatre Company Productions and Social Evenings

13 to 16 April

#### Road



Please note that the play contains very strong language and adult humour, and is not suitable for anyone under the age of 16 or for people likely to be offended by such content.

Join Scullery, your rum-soaked guide, for a journey along Road. This modern classic retains the same power and relevance it had when it first appeared 25 years ago.

By turns brutal, poignant, scabrous and incredibly funny, it is Under Milk Wood transposed to Lancashire and tanked up on cheap cider.

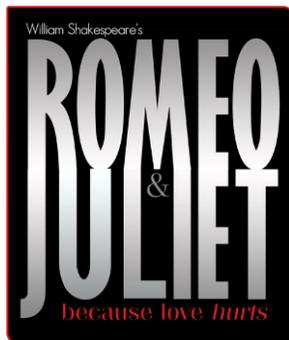
This truly theatrical piece of work takes the audience by the throat and doesn't let go until their teeth rattle.

*An amateur production by arrangement with Samuel French.*

*Doors open at 7pm, show starts at 7:30pm*

22 March -  
reading  
29 & 30  
March -  
auditions

#### Romeo and Juliet



From the team that brought Network Theatre's acclaimed 2009 production of A Midsummer Night's Dream, 2011 promises to go one step further with a powerful and spectacular reworking of Shakespeare's most enduring and tragic love story. This visually stunning production, directed in the round to have a filmic, blockbuster feel, is a must see for next summer.

Romeo Montague is a young, feckless, passionate and inveterate womaniser, taking life as it comes and pleasure where he may. Until he meets the *one*. The one woman who will quite literally take his breath away, Juliet Capulet, the daughter of his father's sworn enemy. From the moment they meet, their destinies are forever entwined and their fates sealed.

Romeo & Juliet teach us that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, but that a rose has thorns.

*because love hurts.*

*Doors open at 6:30pm, reading/auditions start at 7pm*

# Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

1 April

## Harvey



Network Theatre presents a reading (just for fun) of Harvey, written by Mary Chase (also a movie classic starring James Stewart):

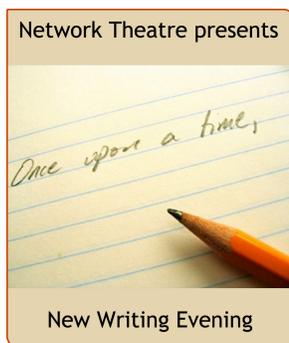
Introducing Elwood P Dowd, the good natured gentleman whose constant companion is Harvey, a six foot tall rabbit that only he can see. To his sister Veta Louise, Elwood's obsession with Harvey has been a thorn in the side of her plans to marry off her daughter, but when Veta Louise decides to put Elwood in a mental hospital, a hilarious mix up occurs and she finds herself committed instead.

It's up to Elwood to save the day with his kindly philosophy, and the help of his "imaginary" friend.

*Doors open at 6:30pm, reading starts at 7:15pm... And the bar will be open throughout! Then...for those of you brave enough, the plan is to head over to The Duke of Sussex for a wee bit of Karaoke!!!*

5 May

## New writing evening



Calling all writers! Network is hosting an evening to hear new writing.

We would love to read a scene of whatever you are working on (approx 10-15 mins).

If you are interested, we will need a scene to read, plus a short synopsis of the play and character list. We will read them as a group and give you (friendly) feedback if you would like. For more details or to be one of the featured writers, please contact Rosie or Cathy on [info@networktheatre.org](mailto:info@networktheatre.org).

*Doors open at 6:30pm, evening starts at 7pm*

## Meetings with Remarkable Saxophonists

As part of our Music Mondays series, we are delighted to welcome back to Network Theatre, the incomparable Eddie Prevost. Those of you who got along to the Music Mondays performances in November and January, will recall the thrilling improvisational music of the Eddie Prevost trio.

Eddie is now presenting a series of Music Mondays during the coming months, featuring outstanding saxophonists such as Evan Parker, John Butcher, or Harrison Smith playing with Eddie on drums together with guest instrumentalists, including some from overseas.

30 May

Meetings with Remarkable Saxophonists, Evan Parker

4 July

Meetings with Remarkable Saxophonists, Harrison Smith

1 August

Meetings with Remarkable Saxophonists, John Butcher

# Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

## Stockholm

Visiting company, 3P Entertainment is presenting this acutely observed love story... with hidden bruises and teeth marks. This is its first London production since it was originally performed by Frantic Assembly in 2007.

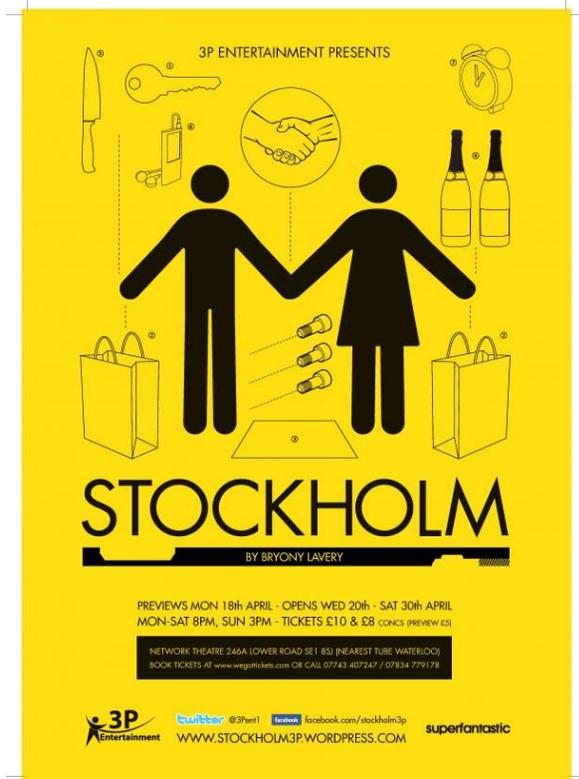
*Stockholm* is written by feminist writer Bryony Lavery, who won Best Play awards for her *Frozen* in 2002, and whose play *Kursk* was produced at the Young Vic in 2009 by Fuel, the company which brought *Jackson's Way* to Network earlier this year.

*Stockholm* comes to Network Theatre from Wednesday 20 April to Saturday 30 April.

*What happens when Death and Destruction fall in love with each other?*

*Todd and Kali are the perfect couple. Today they are celebrating Todd's birthday with breakfast, Bergman and a home-cooked romantic dinner for two. Tomorrow they will be in Stockholm.*

*Strip away their I-podderly and mac-ery, and we are left with two people taken hostage by passion and obsession.*



There's more to come so watch this space or visit [www.networktheatre.org](http://www.networktheatre.org)

All submissions are welcome. Please send to the editor at [news@networktheatre.org](mailto:news@networktheatre.org).

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For all the latest information go to [www.networktheatre.org](http://www.networktheatre.org)

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