

Network Theatre, 246A Lower Road, Waterloo, London SE1 8SJ
www.networktheatre.org

May 2010



The Time Machine from Time for Love

Dear Networkers,

Welcome to the May 2010 edition of our Networking Newsletter.

Grab yourself a cuppa and a dark chocolate digestive (milk chocolate ones just don't cut it), put your feet up and have a read of the reviews of the two pieces of new writing recently shown at Network: Bernie C. Byrne's *A Long Night in London* and Rosie de Vekey's *Time for Love*. Well done to both ladies and their cast and crews for pulling in the crowds.

Your next opportunity to tread the boards will be for Robin Lansman's production of *Outward Bound* by Sutton Vane. The reading will be at Network Theatre on 22nd June, followed by auditions on 6th & 8th July at a venue To Be Defined in the Waterloo area (keep your eyes posted on the website for announcement on location).

Oh and don't forget Network Theatre is hosting a Bollywood Party on Friday 23rd July. So dig out your pantaloons and get ready to tuck into a Bhangra buffet, music and games. See you there!

Toodle pip,

Kirsty, the Editor

All submissions are welcome.

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

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

A LONG NIGHT IN LONDON

A Review by N. Marshall

The performance of 'A Long Night in London' took place days after the 67th anniversary of the Bethnal Green Tube disaster, the event on which the play is based.

The Bethnal Green Tube shelter disaster was the event with the largest number of civilian deaths during World War II, killing 72 people, of which 62 were children, who were crushed in a panicked rush into the bomb shelter when a nearby explosion was mistaken for a bomb attack. Bernie C. Byrnes has worked closely with the Stairway to Heaven Memorial Trust in her research for her writing and uses the personal stories of some of those who died in the tragedy to give weight and meaning to the piece.

That Network Theatre feels hidden away made it an ideal venue for a performance set in an underground tube station. The performance has a strong start; fast-moving, witty and with a great play on language and rhetoric of the era, the audience quickly responded with a sense of war-time camaraderie, joining in with some well-chosen songs. The structure of the play is very effective, switching between wryly comedic radio-style clips that paint a picture of the times and underline just how banal day-to-day life must have been, and the actual storyline of the events leading up to the underground disaster. The repetition of people reminding each other that 'there's a war on, you know' also serves to emphasise how boringly relentless it was.

The casting was incredibly strong, with the leads coming from Bernie C. Byrnes' theatre company, and many familiar faces from Network Theatre filling the supporting roles. While watching the performance I had been distracted at times by small glimpses of uncertainty or moments of stock characters, that is, until I learnt that the supporting roles had been workshopped into the piece within a single day's work. To pull off such a slick performance with clear transitions and no faltering on lines within such a short period suggests real dedication and focus. An impressive achievement!

The set and costume was very well, and very accurately, done, with the climax of the action being focused around a single, hanging light bulb, with hands reaching upwards. While normally a light bulb should provide light, instead it served to emphasise the darkness around them as the crowds were crushed in the panic.

While there were moments when the real subtleties of the script and some of the nuances of character could be developed, no doubt Bernie is conscious of these, as both the writer and director of the play. What was achieved in so short a rehearsal period is truly impressive, and I look forward to seeing the next stage of the life of 'A Long Night in London'.

For more information on how to help the Stairway to Heaven charity, please visit www.stairwaytoheavenmemorial.org

Time For Love: A Review by Richard Davies

Time For Love marks Rosie de Vekey's debut as a writer for Network Theatre, which as a company welcomes the development of new talent. This is to be applauded, as indeed is the bravery of those who are prepared to go through the gestation and birthing pains of bringing new work to life. Rosie has a self-confessed fascination with the concept of time travel which goes back to her childhood. "Time For Love" is a manifestation of that interest, caged within a love story spanning ages.

The central premise of the play is the development by Bernard (played by Sean McMullen) of a time machine, which he hopes will impress his putative fiancée Alison (Suzy de Lezamata). The ensuing to and fro-ing of time travel results in visiting various key periods in history, during which the whole relationship between Bernard and Alison is thrown into doubt.

The set was simple but effective, painted entirely with a mottled pattern with a sole prop of what looked like the front half of a Morris Minor in middle of the stage. This is Bernard's "Time Machine", complete with a sarcastic and often upstagingly funny on-board computer brought courtesy of the vocal talents of Lesley Winterflood. Alison agrees to accompany Bernard on a test flight. It is now that the Director has one of the key production problems to overcome, trying to incorporate the notion of time travel without West End production budgets. Rosie chose to do this with lighting effects and by incorporating the use of a video screen showing key moments in history to illustrate the passing of ages. As a device, this worked well initially, although the inclusion of one shot of a watch face with the hands spinning *forwards* as they travelled back in time was slightly confusing.

It has to be said though, that once the point had been made with this method, that later instances could have done with being far shorter, with some variation, as it left those sitting in the time machine looking rather bored and at a loss as to what to do. It would perhaps have been more impressive to have more impactful music at greater volume, since the sheer quantum level wrenching apart of the fabric of space/time was somewhat under-played. As a general note too, there was a sense of time travel being a rather everyday experience for the characters, whom, it must be said, didn't convey any real sense of wonder at how extraordinary travelling in time would be. The historical cameos however, did provide ample comedy opportunities, the first being an axe wielding Michael Maine as a Viking.

Escaping from the berserker tendencies of the raping and pillaging axeman, by throwing a box of soap powder at him barbed with the further quip from Bernard that "Persil gets rid of the most stubborn Danes" (groan!), it's off to the court of Marie Antoinette. Here we encounter Gaele Comte as an impressive Antoinette, delightfully sniffy and unimpressed. Attending upon her was her maid (Amanda Tidewell) whose relationship with her superior was more than slightly alluded to as Sapphic.

It was during this scene that Rosie did something very astute in the writing which could have been made more of in the time travel sequences, which was to influence history without causing immense harm to the future. The Queen, demanding a gift of her visitors, is offered some lemon drizzle cake by Bernard, which in turn leads to a nice little thematic riff leading to the famous "let them eat cake" remark, thereby triggering the French Revolution. Nicely written, and well delivered by Gaele.

Next up VE day, opening with Susan Small as Mary providing a breath of fresh air, with nice upbeat and energetic delivery, redolent of a cheerful Jo Brand at times, indeed her performance throughout was of a consistently high standard. Her delivery however did highlight one aspect that really needs to be mentioned. Pace. There were times when the energy levels in the first Act dropped with dialogue and momentum suffering as a result, so when someone came on who did actually try and boost the energy levels, the change was marked. There were some funny lines in the first half an hour which were lost simply because the dialogue wasn't sharp or upbeat enough.

The second World War sequence introduced a second love interest for Alison in the form of Dr Andrew Andrews ("so good they named him twice"). Played by Rob McCann he came across as a

rather reserved, sang-froid enriched character who's upper lip was not so much stiff as starched, atrophied and reinforced by carbon fibre. Alison is obviously much taken with him.

To the observer this was a relief, since thus far it had been very difficult to believe that Alison, a sweet and upbeat girl, whom Suzy played with all her considerable might, would fall in love with Bernard in the first place. Sean played Bernard as an over-bearing, self-interested and arrogant character so well that it was nigh on impossible to either have any sympathy for him or care whether he lost out in the love stakes at all. Dr Andrews, although straight-laced to the point of geometrical obsession, at least came across as a likeable chap. Some *passion* would have been nice though, some feeling that love is more than mere infatuation. That sense of urgency of first love would have greatly enhanced the believability of the relationships between the would-be suitors.

The Second World War sequence brought with it a proper wartime cock-er-ney knees up, with a bit of song and dance and the pleasing treat of finding that Suzy de Lezamata has a very good rich, alto singing voice, full credit to her for that. It should also be recorded that Yuriko Walker too has a very good jazz voice as was demonstrated by the prohibition era Chicago gangster scene, her rendition of "What Is This Thing Called Love" was delightful, it being a difficult standard to sing well.

Act II opened with far more gusto and energy, somewhat like a football team having gone in for half-time oranges and the manager giving them a pep talk. There were several notable cameo appearances in the second act which provided fully fledged belly laughs from the audience.

Sharan Hunjan was nothing short of a comedy genius as the Mona Lisa, it is will be hard to ever see her as the glamour-puss she normally presents without remembering her in that scene. If a face could launch a thousand ships, hers would have sunk the Bismarck, the Graf Spee and the Tirpitz in one go. What was cleverer though was the transformation from that to the Mona Lisa's dispassionate smile. Steve Simler too should carry a Scene Stealer Warning Certificate, as his lute playing minstrel, miming to a castrati singing "Greensleeves", was like watching a great scene from a classic Morcambe and Wise show. Although he pretended it was all his own, apparently a great number of socks went into stuffing that codpiece he sported proudly. In the court of Henry VIII we met Anne Of Cleves, played by Emma Byrne, who was also very funny, where deft comedic acting, great timing, nice delivery of lines all led to a very engaging performance.

Act II however, revealed the main dichotomy at the heart of Time For Love. After the romp and hilarity of some scenes, Alison now waxing lyrical about love and her angst with regard to Bernard seemed almost out of place. This was further thrown into contrast by what was easily the best written scene in the play when, through time travel, Alison gets the chance to tell her Alzheimer's suffering father how much she loves him before he dies. Paul D'Orley played the part magnificently with complete conviction and a deeply poignant realism. Suzy too excelled, as both actors responded to lines which they could truly get behind. It was a compelling and beautifully wrought scene.

And that, in a nutshell is where the piece needs to decide what it is, because it is very difficult to straddle convincingly several genres. Rosie's writing is stronger when she is being serious than playing for laughs. Yes, there were some very funny lines in the piece, make no mistake, but as an observer it would have been a willing trade off for more of the love story and more grit throughout, than the at times pantomime romp. There is a far better story at the heart of Time For Love than the comedy sequences allowed space for. Think in terms of "The Time Traveller's Wife" instead of "Back To The Future" or "Bill And Ted's Excellent Adventure" and there is scope for much more development of the play, which Rosie should be very much encouraged to do. It would be interesting to see greater fleshing out of Bernard and Dr Andrew's characters too, both of whom could become more multi-dimensional, as, particularly in the latter's case, it would be nice to see him loosen up more as his love for Alison deepens.

The play ends with a happy ending, with a wedding attended by a Who's Who of historical figures, from a brilliantly wide eyed Chaucer from Kevin Quinn to our friend Anne Of Cleves and Confucius.

All in all, Time For Love was an enjoyable show which the audience evidently relished a great deal. The cast too, deserve credit getting behind the production and putting in some fine performances,

particularly from some of the newer Network members. Rosie should feel proud for having the vision in the first place and the conviction to see it through to fruition.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

14 th June, 8pm	Network Theatre Annual General Meeting
22 nd June, 7pm	OUTWARD BOUND reading, Network Theatre
6 th July & 8 th July, 6.30pm	OUTWARD BOUND auditions (venue TBD)
23 rd July, 7.30pm	BOLLYWOOD PARTY
22 nd – 25 th Sept, 7.30pm	OUTWARD BOUND performances

NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2010

The Annual General Meeting of the Network Theatre Company will be held on Monday 14th June 2010 at 20:00 at the Network Theatre, Lower Road, Waterloo, London SE1 8SJ.

The following agenda will be discussed :

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Report on the 2009 AGM (29.07.09) and matters arising.
3. Treasurer's Report.
4. Chairman's Report.
5. Secretary's Report.
6. Election of Officers.
7. Election of Committee members.
8. Any Other Business.

Nominations for election to the Committee should be sent to the Chairman at least 10 days prior to the AGM. The current committee is as follows : Kay Murray (Chair), Judith Denwood (Secretary), Sam Bullock (Treasurer), Hannah Few, Kirsty Eyre, Richard Burgess, David Harvey, Michael Mayne, Robin Lansman, Nigel Williams, Keith Wait, Rosie De Vekey, Gaelle Comte, Dan Young, Nigel Oatway (co-opted)

The post of Membership Secretary is still vacant; please consider taking this up for NTC.

Please note that you have to be a member to vote. Lapsed members can renew before the start of the meeting in advance or on the night.

If you have any membership queries please send them to info@networktheatre.org

Kay Murray, Chairman (email: david.34murray@btinternet.com)