

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

November 2009 |

Featuring moments from the 70th Anniversary Gala



Network's Favourite Ladies: Marian Cooke (right), Kay Murray and Sheila Murphy (left)

Photographs taken and permissioned by Paul Lunnon

Dear Networkers,

Welcome to the November edition of Networking!

At a recent brainstorming session on ways of sprucing up the newsletter a few novelty ideas cropped up: circling the cellulite, saggy knees and sweat marks of Network's A - list, an Agony Aunt column, Madam Verity's horoscope predictions for the next month and an 'Am I hot or not?' thermometer were amongst the short list. But the bottom line is: What would Members like to see in the Newsletter? Please send your thoughts to newsletter@networktheatre.org

So before we get carried away with voting on whether Peaches Geldolf or Nigel Williams look best in lilac, let's get stuck into how the 70th Anniversary Gala went, more on the David Murray Award and a sneak preview of Happy Chuffing Christmas- some pesky show by some Nobody ☺

The next newsletter should grace your inbox/mail box in December. Oh and whilst we're on the subject of December, Network's Christmas Party will be on Friday 11th December. Stick it in the diary!

Happy reading, Kirsty, The Editor

All submissions are welcome.

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

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HAPPY CHUFFING CHRISTMAS

An interview with Kirsty Eyre, Writer and Director

Before we begin I just want to point out that I didn't sit in a corner like Norma No Mates and ask myself contrived interview questions- always a tad tricky when you're the Editor © The questions were prepared by a Network regular and should allow you a sneak preview of our festive comedy, which runs from **Tuesday 1st- Saturday 5th December.** Tickets are now on sale at www.ticketsource.co.uk/networktheatre

1. So Kirsty, "Happy Chuffing Xmas", an unusual title for a Christmas Show and somewhat milder than it was originally going to be. What made you come up with such a distinctive title?

I think the title says it all really; it's a 'feel good' Christmas show packed with Northern spirit. Happy Chuffing Christmas is made from the ingredients on its Lidl tin. And yeah, the placeholder had always been Happy F***ing Christmas but *Chuffing* is far more in line with its Barnsley roots.

2. What was it about the glamorous environs of Barnsley that made you want to set your play there?

I am a Yorkshire lass. You can take the girl out of Yorkshire but you can't take Yorkshire out of the girl. Have you been to Barnsley? It's beautiful. Okay it may not be the Tuscan Town of Yorkshire that has been touted in the press but what it lacks in architecture, it makes up for in spirit, making it the perfect backdrop for a kitchen sink comedy. The Warburton family are indeed at home in Barnsley.

3. When did you first come up with the idea for the story and give us a sneak peak of the plot line.

Last year I wrote a feature film, *The Exchange*, which I have yet to do anything with. It was a tragic-comedy about a working class family, who take in an Italian exchange student, who changes their lives forever. I kind of pinched the premise but then took things one step further by fast forwarding to Christmas to build this stage play. Christmas has allowed me to capitalise on comedy, opening the doors of the Warburton family's home to show you warts n all. There is never a dull moment inside the walls of this Briar Estate's council flat. The plot takes you on a journey which unfolds over a six month period, culminating in Christmas; a Christmas you'll never forget.

4. How will you manage the language barrier between Barnsley and the South East? Do you see yourself running Henry Higgins-like classes in vowel flattening and exclaiming "By 'eck, tha's got it!"

Urrricanes 'ardly ever 'appen in 'arrogate. Doing a generic Northern accent is one thing for non-natives, but honing in on the Barnsley thang takes it to a whole new level. We've bin mekkin an effort to ee-lon-gate us vowels and get the whole down't, t't thing going on though and the cast are doing a grand job. Ironically nobody in the cast is from Yorkshire so it's a challenge, especially when you're tired, it's late and you've got flu. I guess it's up to the audience to judge the end results.

5. Previously you've written characters based on people you've met in real life, is the same true here?

All characters depicted in this play are fictitious. Any similarity to any person living or dead is merely coincidental. Amen. Seriously though, you write what you know about. And you know about the people that you meet in everyday life. But that doesn't mean to say you write about those people. The characters in my plays are no doubt sub-consciously inspired by loads of different real people, who get mixed up in the fictioniser, the blender of Kirsty Eyre's brain. Any writer will be an observer of people but it's usually random anecdotes, twisted and shaken, that provide good comedy. My *Madam Verity* was inspired by elements of a clairvoyant I met in real life. I will have to go back to the real lady and see whether the universe has informed her of her influences.

6. Did you find it easy to cast this show and what were the major difficulties you encountered?

I was lucky enough to have a cracking turn out at auditions. Thanks to everyone who came along. There were several characters which I could have cast over and over again and others which remained uncast for a while. The biggest challenge was finding people who could plausibly play teenagers. I knew this would be tricky when I was writing the play but didn't want to compromise the

family dynamic so I stuck to my guns. We had a call out for 'our Ross', who finally appeared in the form of Charlie, who is a champion addition to the Warburton family.

7. This script is probably one of the tightest you've written in terms of pace and speed of one-liners. How easy do you find it to self-edit and how hard is it to say "there, it's finished"?

Refining a script is like rolling out pastry. You have to keep ironing out the lumps until its smooth all the way through and even when it's as smooth as you can get it on Monday, it'll look lumpy to fresh eyes on Tuesday. And you can go on forever. The only way I can stop tweaking my scripts is to work to a deadline, which forces you to be 'ready'. Then given the nature of new writing, there will always be edits to the script during rehearsals as you play with the text. And even when you've finished the run, it's not truly finished as you learn more and get new ideas from the performances. I guess it's not 'finished' until the fat lady sings or someone sticks your show on at the West End or Broadway. I haven't sung yet and my show isn't on in the West End so yes, I have a lot of unfinished business.

The other thing you mention - pace and speed of one-liners, is something that I have really pushed at rehearsals as without pace it will all fall flat. This is one of the cast's main challenges, especially when it comes round to the scenes where we join the Warburton family at meal time.

8. What are the challenges in directing a show you have also written; do you find it easy to adapt the ideas of characters in your head to how actors portray them?

Somebody I respect told me you should never direct your own stuff. I kind of see where they're coming from in terms of the writer should never inhibit the director or the cast into chopping and changing things around and actors should never lose the ability to challenge the script. However, all new writing needs workshopping to work out what works and what doesn't and the writer needs to be fully integrated into this process. Directing this premier of Happy Chuffing Christmas allows me to trial the show in the way I see it written. If I'm lucky enough for some big shot Director to come along and want to take the show further, then bring it on! But for now I think I have an open relationship with the cast, who have stepped up to the mark and now own their characters. To be a successful Writer/Director I think you have to be prepared to cut your own work. It always hurts to lose your best one-liners but sometimes it's for the greater good of the play. I've had to put my money where my mouth is on this one and it did sting.

It's during the auditions that I'll start 'flexing' the characters in my head in terms of rethinking how the part can be played. It's one big jigsaw puzzle. Quite often someone will come along and put a completely different spin on a character and it will work in a totally different way than I'd imagined.

9. In Class and Dick Lothario you had pole dancers, in The Suburban Spaceman you had men in boxer shorts wearing pinnies. What eye-openers do you have planned for Happy Chuffing Christmas?

Well I don't want to give the game away but all I will say is, you've never met anyone like our Athena Warburton. You've only to peep in her wardrobe to see that she's a game bird indeed. I am very grateful that Lesley Winterflood has embraced the Athena within and is going for gold on the costume front. I love that. Generally speaking though, this show is more of a display of internal organs than flesh. One scene I am particularly proud of is a father daughter scene between Aidan and Adele, which shows an explosion of guts (mine and theirs).

Another golden nugget is the opening scene of Act 2, which I am very proud of. A lot of work went into this project, which has really paid off. I don't want to spoil the surprise by crediting certain people but a big thank you to those involved.

10. Finally, this sounds like a really funny and entertaining play, why should Network members and friends be making a date to come and see it?

1. Because you'll laugh your socks off and it'll put a smile on your face (hopefully).
2. Because it'll make you feel Christmassy (maybe)
3. Because Network Theatre has the cheapest drinks in town (definitely)

Emily, Assistant Director, who has been a tower of strength, and I look forward to seeing you there. I'll be the one with the carnation and knocking knees.

Memories from Network's Platinum Gala

Many thanks to Keith Wait, Kimberley Bradshaw, Sharan Hunjan, Kay Murray, David Harvey, John Collis and all the Gala cast and crew for their input into making the Platinum Party a success. We hope that you, the audience, cast and crew enjoyed this special anniversary evening.

Network Theatre 70th Anniversary Photos

Have you bought your Platinum Gala Photo Souvenir disc?

The disc put together by Paul Lunnon contains 5 slide shows and costs £10 inc postage.

All profits go to Network Theatre. Many thanks to Paul.

You can either pay by PayPal (Product ID: CD 1106, pay to phl@dsl.pipex.com) or send a cheque for £10 to Paul Lunnon, 44 Caphorne Avenue, Rayners Lane, Harrow, Middlesex, HA2 9NE



The David Murray Award

Congratulations to Eshani Weeresinghe for winning the prestigious David Murray Award. The David Murray Award has been embraced by all. Here is a refresher on the rules for its presentation:

1. The Award was inaugurated in 2009 in memory of past Chairman and life-long member of Network Theatre, David Murray (1944-2008).
2. The Award is given to a Member of NTC who has given outstanding commitment to Network Theatre over a number of years.
3. The Award takes the form of a one-off trophy, which is presented to recipient in perpetuity.
4. The Award is presented annually, on a date determined by the NTC Committee, as close to the birthday of David Murray (21st October) as practical.
5. Members may suggest names of suitable nominees for the Award in writing to the Committee, and the Committee may invite the Membership to suggest such names.
6. The Committee may add its own nominations, but the nominations list shall be kept confidential.
7. The recipient shall be decided by the Committee as its sole discretion at a Committee meeting.
8. The Committee shall not enter into correspondence on its decision.
9. These Rules may be altered at any time by the authority of a majority of the NTC Committee.



And two of Network's favourite men: Paul D'Orley & Steve Simmler in action
Photograph taken and permitted by Paul Lunnon

Next Opportunity at Network: Fred & Madge

Reading for Fred & Madge	6.30pm for 7pm start, Thursday 19 th November
Auditions for Fred & Madge	6.30pm, Wednesday 9 th & Thursday 10 th December

Synopsis: Fred pushes boulders uphill. Madge sieves water into a bathtub. Fred and Madge are ordinary. A middle-aged couple with monotonous lives and Sisyphean jobs. Bored of each other, they would love a little more excitement... That is exactly what they will get. Joe Orton's absurdist drama is a sharp social critique loaded with sexual innuendo and elements of the fantastic.

The players and their playing ages

Fred: Male, early/mid-- you are encouraged to audition if you can play the age, even if it is not your actual age: 40s

Madge: Female, early/mid-40s

Queenie: Madge's sister, Female, early 40s

Gladys: Female, early/mid-40s

Webber: Male, 61

Sykes: Male, 30s

Old Man: Male, 60s

Dr Petrie: Male, 30s-40s

Miss Oldbourne: Female, 30s-40s

Small Parts (Reporter, Newsreader...): Male/Female

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Fred and Madge Read Through	6.30pm for 7pm start, Thursday 19 th November
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Performances of Happy Chuffing Christmas	7.30pm, Tuesday 1st – Saturday 5 th December
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Auditions for Fred & Madge	6.30pm, Wednesday 9 th & Thursday 10 th December
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Christmas Party	7.30pm, Friday 11 th December
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Performances of Fred & Madge	7.30pm, Wednesday 3 rd - Saturday 6 th March
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