

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

October 2009

Featuring a Review of *Remember Me*



Dear Networkers,

Welcome to the October edition of Networking!

Time to grab yourself a cuppa and peruse the goings-on at Network Theatre because it's all systems go under the arches. In fact why not go the full hog and allow yourself a chocolate digestive too.

So did you see Lisa Wallace's *Remember Me*? James McKendrick did and has kindly offered his review - see page 3 - well done to cast and crew. Then last night of course, Network Theatre proudly hosted its 70th Anniversary Platinum gala. A big Thank You to all those involved in pulling off a great evening of entertainment - more of that in the next newsletter.

Next up is Network's Fancy Dress Halloween Party (Saturday 31st October) and the Props Making Workshop (Sunday 1st November) which is being run by Michael Mayne and should be helpful to Directors, Stage Crew and anyone interested in... well, making props!

The next newsletter will grace your inbox/letter box in November.

Kirsty, The Editor

All submissions are welcome.

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

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Halloween Party	7.30pm, Saturday 31 st October
Props Making Class	11am- 4pm, Sunday 1 st November
Maintenance and Clean up day (see below)	10am- 6pm, Saturday 14 th November
Fred and Madge Read Through	6.30pm for 7pm start, Thursday 19 th November
Performances of Happy Chuffing Christmas	7.30pm, Tuesday 1 st – Saturday 5 th December
Auditions for Fred and Madge	6.30pm, Wednesday 9 th & Thursday 10 th December
Christmas Party	7.30pm, Friday 11 th December

HEADSHOTS SPECIAL DEAL FOR NETWORK MEMBERS

Andy Bradshaw is offering a special deal on headshots to Network Members at a greatly reduced rate. Andy works differently to other headshot photographers, as you don't have to go back for expensive repro. You will get a selection of the best shots, hand edited by Andy, plus the best of the rest - meaning you can source the most cost effective way of getting prints and can submit your digital copies to on-line casting websites.

Andy is on 07734 323203 or andy@andybradshaw.com

Maintenance and Clean-up Day: Saturday 14th November

We need to carry out regular maintenance at the theatre to keep it going, so we schedule a number of working days each year. We're hoping that you will be able to come along on the day to help out. It need not be all day, even a few hours would help - we typically start from 10am; and some of us may well go out for a meal in the evening afterwards.

The work usually includes clearing out the unwanted stuff that seems to breed backstage, tidying up what's left, giving the place a good clean up, decorating and maintenance of the premises, and maintenance of the various technical systems.

GRAB YOUR GHOULIES AND SCARE OFF THE GHOSTIES AT:



Network Theatre's FANCY DRESS HALLOWEEN PARTY

7.30pm, Saturday 31st October

Entry: £5.00 for Members, £10.00 for Non Members

Entry includes a hocus pocus cocktail from the witch's cauldron, cobweb nibbles, games, cheesy music and a prize for the best Halloween fancy dress. Be there or be totally square!

REMEMBER ME

A REVIEW BY JAMES MCKENDRICK

Lisa Brunton-Wallace's "Remember Me" had been the subject of much expectation over the summer months at Network. The word was that this was going to be an ambitious multi-media experience, employing projected visuals, live music and staged excerpts from a number of sources. In this respect it certainly lived up to expectations, drawing on the sort of genre-hopping approach popularised by the likes of Knee High Theatre.



Example of Multi-Media effects from Remember Me

Beyond the staging itself, the intent of the production – to cover the impact of war on the participants and civilians that seek to live through it – was equally challenging. Productions which seek to take a state of the nation overview or which shoehorn in references to Iraq without addressing them properly tend either to sink under the weight of their own pretensions or risk trivialising the subject. Brunton-Wallace's production deftly sidesteps these potential pitfalls, taking an impressionistic approach to the subject that is never didactic or proselytising.

The opening of the play was striking and daring, beginning with two children sitting downstage on a monochrome stage, save for a huge swathe of red material suggesting a field of poppies or perhaps a river of blood. This swiftly moves to the cast marching onstage and synchronising with the projected images behind them of troops going into battle. This was an audacious beginning, using movement, film and music to striking effect, with not a word of dialogue uttered for more than five minutes.

This gives way to a vox pop political chat show that climaxes in a projected image of Natasha Hancock delivering the St. Crispin's Day speech from Henry V as a party political broadcast. This is subtly deconstructed by an aide congratulating the politician on their performance, while the camera lingers on the doubt and possible duplicity lingering in her eyes the moment she is off air.

This juxtaposition of different delivery media sets the template for the rest of the show, with live action and projected images constantly alternating and conjoining. Therein lies one of the problems with the production. The projected images, while often visually engaging, are sometimes deployed indiscriminately, rather than used sparingly for maximum impact. In some cases, such as the scene where Talthymbius informs Andromache of the fate her son must face, there is really no need to project the image of a boy on to the screen behind the actors. Not only is this overkill (no pun intended), but it frequently draws focus from the performances, which are excellent – Janice Okoh maintaining a stoical dignity with a fierce passion burning just below the surface and Michael Mayne, imbuing every word with clarity and meaning and giving a masterly performance of how to dominate a stage whilst maintaining a great quality of stillness.

The projected visuals are not just overused, but occasionally lapse into cliché. During a lengthy sequence during which chess pieces move around the board to denote a strategic battle, with the participants as the pawns, I was reminded of a scene from Stoppard's "Squaring the Circle". In this, the narrator sits in a café playing chess to signify the battle between Solidarity and the Communist regime in Poland. His opponent looks up from the board and asks "Why is it always chess?"

However, before this all starts to sound too negative, it should be said that when used more sparingly and strategically, such as in the opening sequence mentioned earlier, the visual projection worked wonderfully and served to enhance, rather than distract from, what was occurring on the stage. And there were some quite wonderful things happening during this production. The many excellent performances included Russell Muir as Camille Desmoulins preparing to face the guillotine, Natasha Hancock as a frighteningly deranged Lady Macbeth and Gareth Kearns giving a hilarious and deliberately hammy Cowardesque performance as Hartley from Percival Wilde's "His Return".

Nicola Randall gave a tremendously poignant performance as a displaced African woman living alone in a council flat by the Thames, traumatised by her experiences in her home country. John Gilligan gave a chilling and disturbingly real portrayal of a soldier preparing to rape another that he had taken prisoner. In a much nuanced performance he convincingly demonstrated the dehumanising effects of war, almost apologetically explaining how he wasn't like this at home, but was alienated to the point where he needed any human contact he could get – even if it had to be obtained at gunpoint.

The final scene, featuring a groom, James Daybell, reading a letter from his brother serving in Afghanistan to wedding guests was very effective. Although it was easy to see where this was going, it was intensely affecting and moving, although this was marred to some extent by being immediately followed with a version of My Way. Indeed the choice of songs in the piece, although immaculately performed (particularly by Nova Reid) was often puzzling and frequently jarred against the mood of the piece, whereas something like Brecht/Weill's Canon Song would have worked perfectly.

However, this was a brave and bold production as well as being a very timely one (with 2009 being the seventieth anniversary of both Network Theatre and the start of the Second World War). With a stronger authorial voice reining back on some of the unnecessary embellishments and perhaps using the projected images more strategically to compensate for the lack of a central narrative, this is a production which certainly has the potential to be taken on further. There was clearly a welter of creativity and inventiveness invested in this show and, if properly harnessed, it could certainly have a life beyond its brief Network run. It is also enormously heartening that the show has brought such a large number of talented people to Network for the first time and it is to be hoped that many of them continue to be involved in future productions. It is fantastic that as Network reaches its seventieth year, it is putting on productions as daring and radical as this and constantly welcoming new blood into the theatre. It augers very well indeed for the eighth decade!

THANK YOU TO OUR REVIEWERS

Thanks to all of our reviewers for the time and effort that goes into crafting an honest critique whilst giving the reader a flavour of the show.
It is much appreciated 😊

A GLIMPSE INTO THE NEXT NEWLETTER...

The next edition of Networking will bring you highlights from Network's 70th Anniversary Platinum Gala, a taste of *Happy Chuffing Christmas*, more information on *Fred and Madge* plus more on Network's Christmas Party. Ooh, ooh, ooooooooooooooooooh.