

Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

October 2010

Dear Networkers,

Welcome to the October newsletter.

There has been much activity during the last month with more to come.

This edition looks back at *Outward Bound* and forward to *The Blue Carbuncle* and *Blithe Spirit*.

The plans for next year have taken a bit of a knock with the withdrawal of two directors.

We all have demands made of our time and these things happen but it does give others a chance to grab the directing reins.

Don't forget the two workshops this month:

Voice Projection - 19 October

Sound System - 21 October

Looking a little further ahead, the first play for next year is *Revenge of the Amazons* by Jean Betts and William Shakespeare.

There is a reading on Tuesday 23 November when director Nigel Williams will try to explain what he is going to do with this piece of Shakespeare turned on its head. With 12 female roles and 5 male, this is *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with a difference. Auditions are on 8 & 9 December.

Rosie de Vekey & Gaelle Comte

Editors

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Outward Bound - a review

By Willy Wonker

Outward Bound was a play that was so unusual and innovative in its subject matter, so unnerving with its blend of fantasy and melodrama that in the 1920's it was universally rejected by theatre producers of the day. The writer of the piece, Sutton Vane, took matters into his own hands and with \$600 and all the passion he could muster, he hired a theatre and put the play on himself. This sense of drive and determination permeated Network Theatre's interpretation of the piece.

Directed by Robin Lansman, who steered an effective course through several demanding tonal shifts, Outward Bound tells the story of a skeleton crew of 8 passengers who meet in the lounge of an unnamed ocean liner. As the story progresses they begin to realise that they have no recollection of where they're traveling to, or indeed, how they got there.

This slow-burning narrative thread keeps the first act moving at a sometimes-stately pace, as we are gradually introduced to the passengers. Henry and Ann, played by Graham Woolmer and Rebecca O' Reilly respectively, bring a charming naivety to the roles. They at first appear to be a young, happy couple embarking on a new life together, but, as with all the characters in Outward Bound, first appearances are deceptive.

Kevin Quinn, as Scrubby, is a reassuring constant throughout the tale. The barman and general steadying hand of the

ship, Scrubby attempts to calm and placate the ever more agitated passengers. As we learn in the second act, Scrubby has made this journey many, many times before, and this comes across in Kevin's gentle and understated performance.

It is with the arrival of Mary-Alice Stack as Mrs Cliveden-Banks that the first half really snaps into life. Bringing a presence and mastery of the stage that belies the theatres modest setting; Mary-Alice burns brightly as the sneering, haughty and thoroughly snobbish Cliveden-Banks.



No one is beneath contempt to Cliveden-Banks, and some of the productions strongest scenes are shared between her and Timothy Morgan, as the generally well meaning but weak willed Mr Prior. Morgan looks every inch the privileged fop, striking a convincing balance between a man who is torn between doing what is easy, and what is right.

Moral ambiguity is a theme that plays constantly through the story, as we learn the passengers are making an inexorable journey towards what for them will be their judgment day. Nowhere is the theme of conflicted morality more apparent than in the performance of William Barklam,

as the Rev. William Duke. A man of faith that has barely any left, Barklam very effectively portrays a decent yet ultimately foundering human being, who visibly struggles with his loss of faith.

Perhaps the strongest physical performance from the fine cast comes from Christina Houghton as the kindly Mrs Midget. My first impression of Christina's character was that she was merely a plot contrivance for Mrs Cliveden Banks to sneer at, but as the play progressed, her different layers were revealed. Christina effected an impressive physical transformation that was highly impressive.

Network stalwart Sean McMullan, as the simmeringly malevolent Mr Lingley rounds out our players of the first act. Pompous, arrogant and utterly convinced that everyone should bow to his will, Mr Lingley gives the audience someone to rail against, and is possibly the least ambiguously sketched character of the collective. Sean enthusiastically tackles this characters dark side, and few tears are shed as when he's condemned to everlasting hell.

This occurs in possibly the stand out scene of the second act. We learn at the end of the first act that the passengers are all dead (the manner of their deaths, with the exception of two characters, being largely unexplained). The ship has docked at its final destination, and the passengers are to be judged by the Examiner.

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He will make the final decision on whether they are to go to heaven, or hell.

Paul D'Orley wrong foots the audience superbly in the role. A kindly, slightly doddering older gentleman, we are made to feel that this good-natured soul couldn't possibly conceive of sending anyone into the white-hot pits of hell.



His treatment of Rev. Duke, for instance, is kindly and compassionate.

It's when the over confident Mr Lingley oozes his way on stage for his final reckoning that we see the Examiner's different side. In what was a genuinely impressive shift of tone, body language and intensity, Paul became a furious avenging force of morality, listing Lingley's many crimes and ordering him into the darkness. Credit should be given to both Dorley for playing against type and giving impressive depth to his character, and Robin for coaxing out such a fine performance.

The final moments of *Outward Bound* see the worthy redeemed, and the unworthy offered at least the chance of future salvation (The Examiner references the fact that Mr Lingley may eventually prove himself worthy of escape from Hell). The revelation that Mr Prior is the long estranged son of Mrs Midget

was as unexpected as it was heart warming.

It's unfortunate that probably the weakest scene in the play is also last. Star-crossed lovers Henry and Ann discover that because their deaths were suicidal in nature, neither heaven nor hell await them. Instead they must spend eternity in purgatory. The admittedly demanding task of portraying their journey back to the here and now wasn't handled brilliantly, though a large portion of the blame here must be given to the writing; it felt contrived and would be classed as a typical Hollywood ending if written today. Ambiguity, at this point, would have been a more satisfying conclusion.

Overall though, *Outward Bound* was a terrific success. A cleverly constructed set, canny lighting throughout, and a well drilled, professional cast ensured that it was a thoroughly enjoyable evening and another success for Network Theatre.

Network Lighting Workshop

By Gopher-Gal

I'm a relative newcomer to Network but one of the great things about this company is the breadth of talent and the willingness to share it.

In early September I was lucky enough to attend a lighting workshop, led by Dan Young. Dan is a terrifically skilled lighting designer, in demand at drama groups across London, but he gave up half his weekend to teach a group of us the basics.

The first thing I learnt is that lighting designers speak a slightly different language to we the uninitiated but here's how to tell your *light* from your *lantern*: "light" is the shiny stuff that falls on the stage. "Lanterns" are the things the light comes out of (and these hardly ever fall on the stage.)

Dan then took us through the different types of lanterns we have at Network and the different types of light they give.

I'd never realised that there were so many different ways of getting a bit of the visible range of the electromagnetic spectrum out onto the actors.

We then moved to the practical part of the day - we learnt how to rig and how to patch; the difference between a circuit, a channel and, most importantly of all, how not to get a disconcerting electric shock while standing at the top of a 15' ladder.

Later on in the afternoon, Dan and his glamorous assistant David Harvey introduced us to the Joy of Gels and Gobos - those essentials that make stage lighting so exciting. No one who was there will ever forget David Harvey's beautiful demonstration of the way the finer points of contemporary dance are enhanced by Congo blue light.

Dan's students were a mix of directors, designers and the just plain curious and there was something for everyone on the course. Thanks to the excellent teaching and my keen fellow students, I'll never look at light (or lanterns) the same way again.



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**Christmas is coming - the goose is getting fat...
Tell me, my dear Holmes, what you deduce from this hat.**

Interview of Emma Byrne by Matilda Briggs

Emma Byrne tells us how a frenzy of inspiration will lead to some Christmas cheer for fans of the great detective, at Network Theatre and beyond.

Emma Byrne: The game, dear Network, is afoot!

Matilda Briggs: *What game would that be..?*

EB: For a while now, we've been kicking around the idea of an audio play at Network - after all, we get a lot of reward for very little input: no scenery to build, no costumes to make, no lines to learn - but at the end of it we get a recording that we can put on the Network website and share with the world.

Also, everybody loves something a little Christmassy as the dark nights draw in.

Finally - those who know me will know of my Sherlock Holmes obsession that borders on the fanatical.

Follow my reasoning closely now - these three facts came together as I was brushing my teeth one morning and the plan for the Network Theatre Sherlock Holmes Christmas Audio Play was born.

MB: *Snappy title.*

EB: Okay then, I'll stick to the original: "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle."

MB: *Doctor Watson isn't a much better title-smith than you are, I'm afraid. But why a Sherlock Holmes story for Christmas? Sir Arthur Conan Doyle isn't one of our more festive writers is he?*

EB: Not immediately - he's certainly no Dickens. But Dickens

has been done to death whereas this gem of a Sherlock Holmes Christmas story really doesn't get the airing it deserves.

"The Blue Carbuncle" opens with the newly-married Watson calling on his old friend to wish him the complements of the season. Holmes is whiling away the hours trying to deduce who owned a hat and goose that were lost on Christmas eve. But what starts out as an idle diversion quickly turns into an adventure when it turns out that the goose has a surprising secret.

It's a heart-warming story of friendship, mercy and a lost Christmas dinner, with a cracking adventure thrown in. Even if you're not a dyed-in-the-wool Holmes-fan, there's lots in this story to love.

MB: *Speaking of dyed in the wool Holmes-fans, I take it you're a new convert. Who do we blame? Benedict Cumberbatch or Robert Downey Jr?*

EB: I must confess that I always assumed Holmes was a tweedy-bummed Victorian and Watson was a bumbling cipher. But then I devoured the books after seeing the 2009 film and, while I really enjoyed both of the adaptations you mentioned, the person who really won me over to these great adventures was John Watson (or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, if you insist.)

Watson is a fantastic story teller - and funny and affectionate with it. At one point an exasperated Holmes demands that he "cut the poetry." That's one piece of



advice I'm glad Watson never took.

MB: *Why are you adapting the story? Surely the easiest thing to do is just to have Watson narrate it as he does in the book?*

EB: When we have such a lot of talent at Network, it would be a crime not to hear some other voices! I'm adapting the story as a 15 to 20 minute audioplay, in which we'll hear from all the characters, from Mrs Oakshot and poor Henry Baker to Mrs Hudson and The Great Detective himself. Changing even a single word of something so well-loved is a hugely daunting prospect though, I admit.

MB: *I hear we have a special guest at the launch on the 10th of December.*

EB: I'm really thrilled about this! Not only will the audience be the first to ever hear this new audio adaptation they'll also hear from Daniel Smith, author of *The Sherlock Holmes Companion: An Elementary Guide*, who has agreed to come along and give a Q&A.

It's going to be an exciting evening!

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Read-through for The Adventure of The Blue Carbuncle: 28 October at 7:30pm. Auditions: 9 November at 7:30pm.

Rehearsal will be on 18 November at 7:30pm and recording will take place on 21 November from 10am to 5pm. All will take place at Network Theatre.

The premiere of the Audio Play will take place on 10 December at Network Theatre at 7pm with a Q&A from the writer and the cast, a full, seasonal bar and a special guest Q&A from Dan Smith, author of "The Sherlock Holmes Companion: an Elementary Guide".

Ms Briggs is eager to hear from a reputable pest-exterminator.



Q&A with Emily Godowski, Director of Blithe Spirit

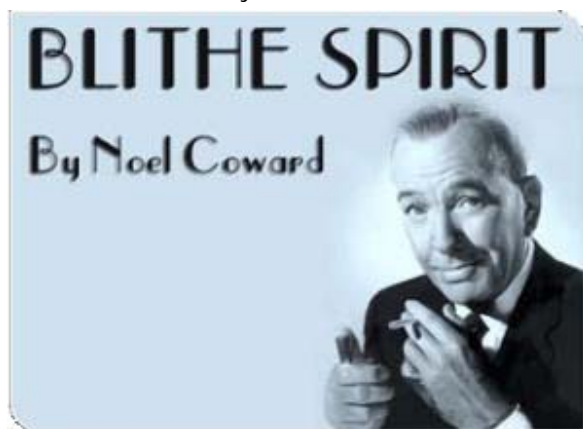
By Rosie de Vekey

Rosie de Vekey: Tell us about Blithe Spirit?

Emily Godowski: Blithe Spirit is one of Coward's best loved farces and tells the story of Charles Condomine, a debonair if rather cynical writer who, in attempting to discredit the trade of clairvoyants and mediums, invites the deliciously batty Mme Arcati to his home to conduct a séance.

To his horror, he is faced with the ghost of his dead wife, Elvira who is intent on being reunited with her husband. However, Charles's current wife, Ruth, is not letting him go without a fight.

The play crackles with wit and a heightened sense of the absurd as the real and supernatural worlds collide. The love triangle and the innate hypocrisy of middle class morality are themes which Noel Coward loved to portray in his theatrical works and Blithe Spirit deals with both beautifully.



RD: What made you choose to direct it?

EG: I had seen the 1947 David Lean film featuring Rex Harrison as Charles and was captivated by the sharpness of the dialogue and what my mother would call the "twitty Britishness" of it all.

Having directed the relentlessly dark and absurdist "Six Characters in Search of an Author" by Luigi Pirandello at university, I couldn't imagine a better antidote for my next directorial effort!

The Network Theatre 70th Anniversary celebrations of 2009 and this year's commemoration of the London Blitz (during which the play was written) seemed to call for a classic piece of British nostalgia and some 1930's glamour. And what better time for that than the Christmas slot?

RD: What can we expect from your production?

EG: Plenty of laughs, glitz and a touch of magic to kick start that run-up to Christmas!

RD: How is it going so far?

EG: We start rehearsals on 4th October but I am already blessed with a cast who are brimful of ideas and enthusiasm. If we can get that dialogue tripping off the tongue nicely we will have won half the battle. I'm also looking forward to working with the crew in creating some of the more supernatural effects required of the piece.

RD: What do you think will be the biggest challenges of the show?

EG: The break-neck speed of the dialogue, a challenge my cast are all too aware of but raring to get to grips with! And managing a good deal of stage trickery...where's Paul Daniels when you need him?

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RD: Have you cast the show?

EG: I am delighted with the cast who I consider more than capable of pulling this off and I'm particularly happy to welcome two new members to Network Theatre. Always good to have fresh input.

Charles Condomine - Julian Farrant

Ruth Condomine - Laura Courtney

Elvira - Zoe Hart

Dr Bradman - Andy Bradshaw

Mrs Bradman - Laura Blundell

Mme Arcati - Sacha Walker

Edith - Kay Murray

RD: How do you feel about directing?

EG: I am really excited about this much as going to see "Design for Living" at the Old Vic slightly put the frighteners on me! It was super slick!

I have been with Network as an actor across two years and then had two stints assistant directing last year, learning the ropes from the my impressive friends Andy Bradshaw and Kirsty Eyre.

This seemed like the logical next step and I have a great cast and crew to inspire me.

RD: Is there anything you need for the show?

EG: 1930's period costume (particularly for the ladies) would be very helpful as well as any interesting period pieces (art deco) for the set which is a living room.

We do not have a wardrobe mistress as such and we are relying heavily on what we can find but someone handy with a needle and thread would be a gift if we needed to create anything from scratch or make alterations.

If anyone can help - please get in touch with Emily!

Network Theatre 2011 calendar - two plays wanted

By Nigel Williams

Unfortunately two of the directors for 2011 have had to withdraw, which means there are once again opportunities for all would be directors. The slots in question are April and December.

If you would like to direct a play please get in touch with me as soon as possible with your ideas. A synopsis and cast summary will be very helpful.

Barry Clarke has a longing to see Alan Bennett's "Kafka's Dick" in Network. He does not want to direct it himself, so if you fancy putting this play on stage let me know.

Contact Nigel on plays@networktheatre.org



All submissions are welcome. Please send to the editor at news@networktheatre.org.

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For all the latest information go to www.networktheatre.org

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