

NETWORKING



Newsletter of the Network Theatre Company—
Summer – Autumn 2005

<http://www.networktheatre.org>

Network Theatre Company—Lower Rd,



Lysistrata

What did you think?

A review inside

From the Editor

As you will see from this newsletter, there has been a great deal going on over the past months, which explains in part why it has taken so long to produce this newsletter. Kirsty Eyre has kindly agreed to join me in preparing this and future editions so I hope you will not have to wait so long again.

Nicki Pruss

Newsletter Submissions

Please send any submissions to editor- Nicki Pruss or Kirsty Eyre at: ntc_news@yahoo.co.uk
The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of The Network Theatre's committee or it's members.

All submissions are welcome.

REVIEW— LYSISTRATA Director—Michael Mayne

Men from Mars? Women from Venus?

Michael Mayne took the show in both hands in every sense as Drakis and Director and produced an entertaining look at an old story.....men are from Mars and women are from Venus! Who holds power and who is really in control? *Lysistrata*- a romp, a comedy, a sociological study? Come and ask me later?

The characters were larger than life in every way - costumes were colourful and flamboyant...it must have been fun in the days of ancient Greece! Some shocking language from the outset left the audience (although warned by the flyer) initially surprised or even uncomfortable. Gradually as the language and strap on penises became common place, the audience began enjoying the freedom of looking at life's struggles from a basic instinct and very amusingly played perspective. I think saying 'cock' on stage is something many of the cast may not have done too often, but they handled it well.

Some contemporary additions to the script were not always delivered with sufficient gusto or clarity by a number of characters which left the audience a little lost as to their relevance. A scene in which the Magistrate (**Keith Wait**) went into the audience suffered from a lack of confidence. However stepping out into the crowd is not a comfortable thing for many performers to do and he certainly gave it a good shot.

Andrea Mentlikowski managed the taxing, central role of *Lysistrata* well. Her enthusiasm enabling the pace of the show to be maintained and the action and juices flowing. Would men stop the war if the women withheld sex from them for long enough? Could the women resist the temptation? The drunken oath scene in which all womenfolk promise to abstain produced a particularly amusing and memorable performance from **Mahalah Nice**. Her characterisation of the increasingly tipsy Caloniki was a mastermind of comic expression and slick delivery.

Another memorable scene was at the Parthenonthe raging and unsatisfied erection of Kinesias (**Will Titterton**) caused him to be driven to near madness by his realistically frustrating, temptress wife, Myrrhini. **Annabel Champion** stole this scene with excellent comic acrobatic antics and gesticulation which pleased the audience as Kinesias squirmed in his agony. The younger women were supported by more 'experienced' ladies of the cast, who challenged manhood with cunning and wit, rather than short skirts. **Jennie Rich, Mo Munday, Dian Murphy and Jayne Jones** played their roles with a well balanced mix of feistiness, cynicism and humour.

In all *Lysistrata* proved to be an entertaining show, giving Network the variety it loves. The finale — Kama Sutra, Greek style, proved a great way to go down. Well done to Michael Mayne and the cast.

Robin Lansman

EXTRA TIME

by
Ian Smith

Tuesday 27 September to Saturday 1 October at 7.30 pm

New writing by one of our own

NETWORKING

PASSAGE TO PRAGUE - *Andrea Mentlkowski*

A cast of 20 travelled to Prague this year to perform "Lysistrata" at the Prague Fringe Festival. With Michael Mayne at the helm, we were the only amateur group to take part. Box office figures revealed our audience numbers to be greater than average for the festival, and Mike was invited to return next year!

But of course, you don't want to hear a sunny success story. You want the dirt... You will be pleased, then, to know that the experience was not without its tribulations. Thanks to a rather strong dose of sunstroke during the tech, Amelia revealed an unusually schizophrenic side to her character of Lampito (she laughs, she cries, she has conversations with herself!). Then there was Will's scene-stealing cock-piece, which broke and inadvertently detached itself during a rather crucial scene (the times when a detachable penis may be convenient does not include a love scene!) And then there was that mysterious burglar raiding our youth hostel while we slept, resulting in Will's phone being stolen, and other more unusual items such as Mike's trousers and Jayne's... erm... moisturiser.

Thankfully, in the land where beer is cheaper than water such sorrows were easily drowned. We spent many an afternoon in the beer garden at "Nostitz", which we affectionately [mis]pronounced "Nose Tits" (influenced by the bawdy nature of Lysistrata's script)...

An invitation to the British Embassy provided us with an infinitely more civilized tipling experience, joining other fringe festival performers for Gin and Tonics and canapes in the garden.

This was followed by a parade through the streets of Prague with the Grampian Police Band, cast members in full costume handing out flyers in a bid to attract prospective audience numbers ("attract" being the operative word in this case...). Standing on St Charles' Bridge surrounded by Bohemian architecture, dressed in what amounted to belly-dancing costumes next to men with giant cockpieces, most certainly had to be a contender for Most Surreal Experience Award!!

A final highlight had to be our last night together in "*Europe's Biggest Nightclub*", providing us the opportunity to engage some daggy-dancing and try out some chat-up lines we'd read in TIME OUT e.g. "You are a babe" and "Would you like to taste my goulash?" This was also the night when the infamous Nigel Sandwich was invented. The Recipe - 1 Nigel (the filler) / 1 Mahala (bread #1), 1 Andrea (bread #2) / 1 dancefloor, cheesy music and copious amounts of alcohol. Infuse Nigel, Mahala and Andrea with aforementioned alcohol, add cheesy music to taste, shake them all about on the dancefloor. Then position Mahala and Andrea either side of Nigel, squeezing them close together, add gyrations and an ill-performed backbend on Nigel's part, and allow the floor to slowly meet Andrea's backside, quickly followed by Nigel and then Mahala to achieve a "Nigel Sandwich" (I think you get the visual). Mmmmm... a tasty treat that's sure to reveal your classy side! Na Zdravi!!

REVIEW— MIXED DOUBLES

Lulling audiences down a dark tunnel in Waterloo station during the peak of the summer is always challenging... but the directors, cast and production teams of Mixed Doubles succeeded. In fact they did more than succeed. The six plays comprising Mixed Doubles drew large audiences and left everybody talking. The plays were short, sharp and bitter sweet at times, all touching on the intricacies of relationships and their challenges- something that every audience member could relate to. As a result the theatre was filled with wry giggles as each insight in to love, lust and companionship unfolded.

A Man's Best Friend, directed by Vanessa Edwards, showed a newly wed couple traveling to their honeymoon. Keeping the characters anonymous (credits go to 'The Bride' and 'The Groom'), meant that they could be any couple in the world. This play explored the quirks and hang ups of what it means to enter married life from a practical and psychological point of view rather than glamorising the romance of the honeymooners. It was Vincent La Placa's first performance at Network and he appeared to revel in the part of The Groom. Unable to accept his new found status, his hissy fit over a piece of intruding confetti will not be forgotten. Meanwhile Katherine Jenner, nonchalantly popping chocolates in to her mouth, brought to life the long to suffer Bride. We were left wondering whether the couple would make it through sickness and health 'til death do them part, or whether The Groom would be more suited to growing old with a King Charles Spaniel as man's best friend.

Score, directed by Victoria Waddington, was something completely different. The play uses the imaginative concept of a man and his wife, as tennis partners, playing a match with an imaginary couple, Jane and Jim, as opponents. Highly competitive Harry (Ben Robb) is eager to show off his tennis prowess whilst Sheila (Ursula Smyth) is forced to grin and bear it, as only a lady of the tennis club knows how. Moving around the court, smashing at imaginary balls, served up a true sense of the audience standing on the sideline, judging whether the poignant comments were either in or out. As the match became more tense and the relationship more strained, it was spot on that Sheila should warm to Jimmy (and his smash!) and Harry should take a shine to Janey. The play was well directed in terms of use of the stage and focus on the match. Credit is also due to the actors, as it is easy to overlook the challenge of performing a string of monologues in the form of an imaginary dialogue, in terms of delivering lines, expression and energy in response to nothing. The recommended technique? Always keep your eye on the ball.

The Age of Excess, directed by Nicki Pruss, quite simply had everyone in stitches. This dating agency anecdote was well scripted, well cast, very polished and seamlessly directed. It was impossible not to get swept away with this short play - the only one to have a cast of more than two - as both a comedy and a very accurate yet cynical account of the dating game. As the stigma of speed dating, internet dating and dating via agencies has metamorphosed in to the latest craze, *The Age of Excess* is topical, tragic and yet tremendous and ridiculous all at the same time. Hannah Tasker as Brigitte, had us all in hysterics as she re-recorded her dating debut video and progressively younger and sexier - coupled with Nigel Oatway, who played the straight laced Dieter to perfection in his eighties children's television presenter glasses. The play managed to touch on alcoholism, homosexuality, ageing and the inability to express love in a light hearted but not flippant manner. Stephanie Nattu (appropriately power dressed as Anita) and Steve Cook (the somewhat irritating Peter), both newcomers to Network, had great debuts. It was Samantha Bullock's strong performance as Rita - disgruntled, frustrated yet grounded partner of the dating agent - who brought credibility to the mishmash of a characters. In a nutshell, I was so entertained, I hadn't written a single note for this review by the end.

Permanence, directed by Robin Lansman was a down to earth play, set within the confines of a tent. A middle aged couple are forced to talk about life when Helen (Samantha Bullock) loses her glasses and can't read her books. Peter (William Barklam) tries his best to continue reading and avoid talking about serious stuff. *Permanence* manages to address the subtle worries of life and love

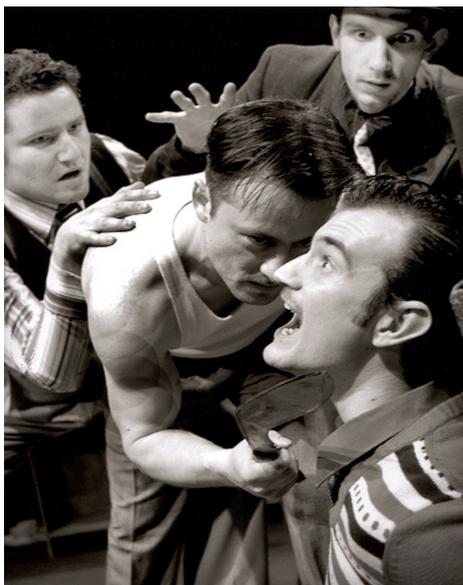
away from melodrama. It is very real. Helen has turned 40? Has she lost her looks? Her figure? Does Peter still find her attractive? Did they want more kids? As Peter is happy to brush all these day to day concerns under the carpet, when the subject is addressed, it is a massive step forward for the pair of them. This script was challenging in terms of long bouts of philosophizing and questioning. Samantha Bullock excelled in being that middle aged woman. I don't think Peter needed to be quite as frustrated with Helen – may be that's because I'm a woman!

Countdown, directed by Hannah Tasker, was unique in its delving in to the world of routine and reflection between an elderly retired couple. Life has slowed down but there is plenty of hidden meaning in the simplest actions. The teapot lid. The tray. The sugar. They all relate to bigger more important things than their face value – independence, health. Marian Cooke and Paul D'Orley brought him and her to life with fantastic energy exerted with perfect timing. The relationship between him and her, is full of affection balanced with frustration for each other's quirks.

And finally... *Norma*, directed by Hannah Tasker, says it all really. The play is dedicated to Norma, is all about Norma and we don't even know the name of her object of... well, not even affection. We know everything about Norma, her affair, the relationship she has with her husband, his likes, her likes and yet nothing about him. Andrea Mentilkowski was fantastically aloof and cold in her delivery of Norma's outlook on life. Her tone of indifference somehow added cruelty to her character as an ice queen. Robin Lansman captured the love fool very well and the audience was left feeling sorry for him but also frustrated that he didn't stand up to himself more. The cold setting of an anonymous bus stop and costumes comprising outdoor coats somehow added to the cold, calculated demeanor of Norma. The play left you questioning how some people may not ever be able to love.

Kirsty Eyre

MOJO MOVES ON



"It deserves to be sold-out every night "
"Peter Fortune as 'Baby' is mesmerising"

After the sell out run of **Mojo** by Jez Butterworth at Network Theatre in March this year - the production, directed by Gabby Vautier, will be returning with a few changes. The production will take place at The Rosemary Branch Theatre, 2 Shepperton Road, London N13 DT - www.rosemarybranch.co.uk for 3 weeks **6-25 September 2005** (Tues - Sun shows). Further details (& directions to the theatre) are on the Rosemary Branch website <http://www.rosemarybranch.co.uk/> & www.eatthecake.co.uk (the Mojo website).

If you missed it at Network make sure you catch it at the new venue and if you saw it and enjoyed it come back (with a few friends preferably!) to see the new version with a slightly different cast. Issues of power, violence, trust and abuse are interwoven in this sublimely dark comedy. Jez Butterworth's authentic script captures the feel, language and vitality, the humour of these desperate men. It offers the audience an unforgettable journey into all the darkest parts of our nature. After all - if you were desperate - just what would you be capable of.....?

"The physicality of each individual (especially Potts) are excellent. You feel you could take away the lines and still know what was going on. This comes from good direction and the ability to really highlight every piece of plot progression in the text."

Gabby Vautier & the Mojo Cast and Crew

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Director's Eight:

Interview with Nigel Williams on "A Family Affair" by Alexander Ostrovsky

1. Why did you choose 'A Family Affair' to direct at the Network Theatre?

The daughter of a friend of mine had done the play at school and thought I might enjoy it. I was vaguely aware of Ostrovsky but had never seen or read any of his plays. "A Family Affair" made me laugh as I read it and I could see scenes playing out in my imagination. The characters are so calculating and devious. As I read I was reminded of many of Moliere's themes and of Jonsons "Volpone". I thought it would make a good play for Network because it has a broad range of ages, could have fairly simple sets and not too large a cast to rehearse in the summer months.

2. What was the overall feedback from the reading?

I was delighted by the number of people at the reading. Remember that this production is an afterthought in that it was not part of the planned 2005 season. If those who came to the reading had not found some of what I had in the script then it would not now be in rehearsal. The overwhelming view was that we should do it and I'm pleased to say that this was reflected in the numbers who came to audition.

3. How were you restricted in terms of casting?

The cast has an age range of 16 to 70 so to that extent I faced no restrictions. Most of the characters are clearly defined. For example Bolshov and Agrafena are the parents of Lipochka, whose age is known. In terms of the auditions there were nine people trying for the role of the young daughter and two for that of her father. To that extent I was restricted in my casting. Network is short of men but that is true of many theatre groups. Having said that, I have been able to assemble a fine company who, three weeks in to rehearsal, seem to be having fun and haven't disappointed me yet.

4. You were debating as to whether to base the production in a modern day setting. What did you go for in the end and why?

The play was written in 1850 and I have decided to stay in that period. The theme of greed is universal and timeless. Nick Dear, the translator, acknowledges that he has made some of the language more contemporary and I feel that to pull the play out of its original setting would be to undermine some of what Ostrovsky was trying to do. This play so offended the Russian merchant classes that they petitioned the Tsar to have it banned - which he duly did. The cast will be in period

costume but my hope is that the audience will come away with the feeling that when it comes to greed and ambition perhaps not a lot has changed in 150 odd years.

5. What do you believe the main challenges of the play will be?

To ensure that the comedy is purely in the mind of the audience. This is a comic play but the characters are deadly serious. There are numerous points in the play that could be played very much for laughs but I want to avoid that. The characters in this play may be fools but they are not stupid.

6. Have you had to alter the script in anyway?

The script is as yet unchanged and the license does not permit changes. Perhaps we will be emphasising different aspects of character than the first production of this translation by Cheek by Jowl but Nick Dear's language and style requires no re-writing.

7. How can Network members and friends support you with this production?

If anyone has two matching carver chairs with upholstered backs and seats please get in touch! We would also greatly appreciate anyone skilled with a sewing machine. Without giving too much away, we need some hemming doing, not for costumes but for various bits of the set. The biggest problem, quite literally, is carpets. I would like two big carpets to cover as much of the stage as possible. So if anyone wants to make room in their garage or loft please let me know.

8. When can we come and see it?

As this play is being squeezed into an already busy calendar we can only perform for three nights. Thursday 27, Friday 28 and Saturday 29 October at 7.30 pm. Speaking as an occasional actor, it helps the rehearsal process to know that people want to come and watch you. Staring at a booking sheet with eight names on it a week before the first night is pretty depressing so I hope people will book their tickets early.

Kirsty Eyre

NETWORK BOX OFFICE

To get tickets for all productions
email: tickets@networktheatre.org