

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

January 2010

NETWORK'S LATE LATE CHRISTMAS PARTY



Happy New Year Networkers.

Well we tried to keep Christmas alive for as long as possible with the Late Late Network Christmas Party in January – thanks to Robin and Judith for braving the big freeze in flip flops and making it a slip slop slapstick fun and festive event... but now 2010 is firmly underway and it's going to be a good'un (apparently).

We have a sneak preview of Fred & Madge (see page 4 for an interview with Directors Nicci & Jess) and in addition, you'll see that another brand new play has been squeezed into Network's 2010 calendar: *A long night in London*. This piece of new writing by Bernie Byrnes (see next page for more details) will be performed from 11th – 13th March. It (in my humble opinion) is tremendously well written so don't miss out. The reading is Tuesday 2nd February and auditions will be held on Tuesday 16th February. See you there!

In this edition David Harvey provides you with a glimpse behind the scenes at Network and there are plenty of dates for your diary. That's a point; have you got your 2010 diary yet?

Kirsty, The Editor

All submissions are welcome.

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

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A LONG NIGHT IN LONDON

A New Piece of Writing by Bernie Byrnes

Writer/ Director Bernie Byrnes has penned this piece in time for a reading at Bethnal Green Library for the Survivors and their families of the Bomb Shelter Tragedy.

The play reading will be part of the 67th Anniversary (the tragedy was on 3rd March) Remembrance activities and will feature four seated actors, no lights or sound. The survivors will have an opportunity to offer feedback.

The Bethnal Green Bomb Shelter Tragedy

One hundred and seventy three people died in a terrifying crush as crowds of people tried to enter the station's bomb shelter; sixty-two of the dead were children. At 8.27pm a frightening roar went out as a nearby anti-aircraft battery fired a salvo of a new type of anti-aircraft rockets. The weapon was secret, with an unfamiliar sound. Apprehension turned to panic. As the crowd surged forward down the slippery steps a woman fell near the bottom of the first staircase. A man tripped over her, and a tragic human domino effect had begun... It's a very sad story.

The second stage is to mount three 'work in progress' performances at Network Theatre using lights and sound. Performances will run from 11th – 13th March at Network Theatre.

Bernie requires 20 actors to perform alongside the four actors involved in the play reading. They, along with the audience, will be asked for their feedback on the piece following each performance. All proceeds from this show will be going to the Stairway To Heaven Memorial Trust, which is a registered charity.

The third stage of the process is for Bernie to redraft the piece for a full performance at the Edinburgh Festival this year and then hopefully tour.

Although a regular user of Bethnal Green tube, Bernie wasn't aware of the tragedy until last year when some of the survivors were interviewed on 'The Week We Went to War' on the BBC. She contacted the Stairway to Heaven Memorial Trust and discovered that they are a group of pensioners who devote all their time to this cause without much support from the authorities. Bernie wanted to help out in some way and being a playwright this seemed the logical thing to write a play about it.

- Reading:** **Tuesday 2nd February**
- Auditions:** Tuesday 16th February
- Rehearsals:** All day workshop: Sunday 7th March (10am - 6pm)
Dress / Tech: Wednesday 10th March 7pm - 10pm.
- Performances :** Thursday 11th – Saturday 13th March

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DOES YOUR SHOWREEL NEED UPDATING?
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FRED & MADGE

Performances at Network will be from Wednesday 3rd – 6th Saturday March



An Interview with Nicci Marsh and Jess Farley

1. Obvious question, but what made you ladies want to direct Fred & Madge?

Nicci: I love the way absurdism communicates with an audience, and that you will always feel a little a little uneasy about what you are witnessing on stage. The characters seem laughably unreal and yet there are aspects to them that we recognise very clearly in people we know, and even have to admit in ourselves. I also liked the idea of taking a play that hasn't really been produced very much before; it gives one a lot of freedom for one's own interpretation and ideas.

Jess: Nicci found the play and introduced me to Joe Orton, but I fell in love with it as much as she did and it's great fun to direct. I think my favourite part of the play – besides getting an insight into how much Joe Orton wanted to rage at society - is how only when you start to piece it together visually with a cast onstage that you begin to understand what Orton was trying to (at times quite clumsily) express. On a first and second read, the play is almost too absurd to comprehend, but when you break it down and see it emerge visually you realise quite how complex the piece is and what a genius Orton really was – even when his craft wasn't as refined as it would later become.

2. Fred & Madge was Joe Orton's very first play. Are you a fan of his later work?

Nicci: I am, and you can see a real development in his style. It is interesting to see the first versions of themes in Fred and Madge that will come out in a more refined concept and language later on.

Jess: I am a fan and like Nicci expressed, it's great to read through his body of work and then return to his first play to see the root of what would become prominent themes in his later work.

3. The play was written in 1959, how does the dialogue stand up in today's 2010 society?

Nicci: While some of the references are specific to the time, for me it highlights that we are still having the same conversations and have very similar day-to-day concerns as 50 years ago.

Jess: While some of the cultural references may be lost on a 2010 audience, the social commentary is still very relevant over 50 years later and the themes being explored are ones that will be accessible to any audience that finds humour in the absurd and ridiculous.

4. How are your rehearsals going?

Jess: Rehearsals are progressing well and the cast are very enthusiastic. The rehearsal space is a little chilly so of course there have been face-offs over who gets to stand in front of the heaters, but no serious injury has been inflicted yet.

5. Boulders, baths, primeval forests... what are your plans for the set?

Nicci: The set will take quite a stark, exposed style, supporting the deconstruction of the play text as the play develops. Gary Cross is helping us by creating a lamp-post, and we are playing with ideas for our forest. It was the idea of creating a forest on stage that first grabbed my imagination.

6. I am intrigued as to what constitutes an 'absurdist drama'. What does this mean to you?

Nicci: The roots of absurdism strike a chord with me. I'm very interested in the idea of an artist seeking an entirely new voice to describe a disillusioned generation.

Jess: Absurdist drama for me is theatre of the seemingly ridiculous that on the surface makes little sense and/or is funny because it is silly, but when analysed is actually making a point. It is social commentary that is veiled in a little bit of crazy.

7. Have you directed anything before? What are you finding your major challenges to be?

Nicci: Jess and I have a theatre company, Thisisit! Theatre and have co-written and directed a show that previewed in London before going up to Edinburgh last year.

Jess: The cast is a bit bigger than our previous cast, so initially that was a little bit intimidating, but everyone is so keen and excited about the project that they are just a pleasure to work with.

8. What is your favourite scene so far?

Nicci: I love the scene between Madge, Queenie and Gladys sieving water over the bathtub. Their conversation reveals a lot about them and their relationships with each other, but it is the visual image that we hope to create that really grabs me.

Jess: I love the final scene where the players are using their laughter to get the buildings to collapse - there is so much energy with the overwhelming laughter being conducted to a crescendo by Fred.

10. Do you need a hand with anything that fellow Networkers may be able to help out with?

Can anyone lend us a bath tub with feet for the performance week? Or a pony!

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY	
TUESDAY 2 nd FEBRUARY, 7PM	A LONG NIGHT IN LONDON Reading
TUESDAY 16 th FEBRUARY, 6.30PM	A LONG NIGHT IN LONDON Auditions
WEDS 3 rd – SAT 6 th MARCH, 7.30PM	FRED & MADGE performances
THURS 11 th – SAT 13 th MARCH, 7.30PM	A LONG NIGHT IN LONDON performances
SAT 20 th MARCH, 10am onwards	Maintenance & Clean up day
WEDS 21 st – SAT 24 th APRIL, 7.30PM	TIME FOR LOVE performances

Behind the Scenes

A glimpse by David Harvey

As I'm sure you're aware a lot needs to happen behind the scenes to ensure a successful show. Network is fortunate in having a great group of people working backstage with a wide range of skills and experience, all contributing to a good audience experience. Often this contribution is only really noticed when, for some reason, it's not there!

The backstage team works with the director and cast in the rehearsal weeks running up to the performances. In addition there will be a set to design and build, props and furniture to be sourced, costumes to be made or adjusted to fit, sound effects and music to be recorded, and lighting to be designed and rigged. These 'backstage' elements are brought together with cast performances through the technical and dress rehearsals to ensure the show can run smoothly, on cue, with lighting and sound operators and a stage crew working under the guidance of the stage manager.

We always aim to be as professional as we can, given our restrictions on time and money and have several different "departments":

- Costumes/Wardrobe - Kay Murray
- Lighting/Electrics (LX) - Dan Young
- Props/Furniture - Michael Mayne
- Stage Management/Set/Sound - David Harvey

We also help to maintain the various facilities and systems in the theatre, such as the lighting and sound systems, the back stage workshop and storage areas etc. Working days are set aside about once a quarter when we call for help from all members to carry out maintenance, cleaning and tidying. We need your help so please give us a hand. The next Working Day will be on **20th March**.

We're always looking out for new people to join the backstage team, so if you are interested please do get in touch, whether you have done it before or not. We're all continuously learning about new things from each other or from having to do something new or challenging for a show with a very limited budget. We always aim to be as professional as we can, given our restrictions on time and money...

If you're interested in helping out backstage, please write to tech@networktheatre.org and let us know your areas of interest – perhaps you're not done it for a while, or want to try something new? If backstage isn't for you, but you'd like to help out off-stage, our FOH team also welcome help with the various front of house activities.