

Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

January 2012

Dear Networkers,

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2012.

This month we are delighted to include the review of Happy as a Sandbag. We look forward to the exciting production of The Tempest, coming to Network in February.

We also include details of the Writer's Guild Theatre Encouragement Awards 2011, accepted by Nigel Williams and Kay Murray on behalf of Network Theatre.

Dates for your diary:

PLEASE NOTE CHANGES TO THE APRIL SHOW:

Pack of Lies by Hugh Whitmore (replaces Breaking the Code)

Reading 26th January, Auditions 31st January and 2nd February.

Tickets are on sale for The Tempest (Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays only 9th February - 3rd March) through our website www.networktheatre.org.

See the fantastic trailer - www.networktheatre.org/tempest/

**Not the Network Christmas Party - drinks, nibbles and catching up in the bar. Bring some food to share and enjoy the cheapest bar prices in London!
Friday 27th January - Don't Miss It!**

Happy New Year!

Rosie de Vekey & Gaelle Comte
Editors

In this issue:

Review of Happy As A Sandbag By The Man in the Back Row	p. 2
Preview of The Tempest by Kirsty Eyre	p. 3
Interview with Keith Wait on the Tempest production	p.4-5
Writer's Guild Theatre Encouragement Award	p. 6
Network Needs...	p.6
Audio-plays	p.7
The Network Committee	p.8

Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

Happy as a Sandbag - a review

Happy as a Sandbag was devised by Ken Lee and is a glorious musical revue encompassing the experience of the Second World War through music and sketches. From the home front; the Land Girls and the 'dig for victory' effort, factory workers and evacuees, to the boys on the front line, *Happy as a Sandbag* delivers a nostalgic, bitter-sweet reminder of an important chapter in our history.



Christina Houghton and James McKendrick

The show tells the story of the war through a mammoth 54 songs, including wartime classics *Run Rabbit Run*, *Wish Me Luck*, *We'll Meet Again*, *White Cliffs of Dover* and *Rule Britannia*. The group numbers were performed impressively with gusto, led by a fantastic band (Horacio Lopez, Will Dollard, Josh Spear). The musical director, Jasmin Rodgman must be congratulated for the enthusiasm and confidence exuded by the cast.

The cast performed sketches in-between the musical numbers, which included Neville Chamberlain's announcement of war (a pitch-perfect Steve Simler), a small boy evacuated to the country (a convincing Christina Houghton), a struggling mother (Kaarina Vanderkamp), Max Miller (*Tiru Thiruvilangam*) and Land Girls (Lisa Clayton and Cathy Neeson). These vignettes offered a chance to see the realities of war, portrayed in a light-hearted manner.

Credit must go to Paul Lunnon and Leyla Husseyin for the fantastic set. It comprised a central 'runway' used for a variety of purposes and featured an Anderson shelter (suitably sandbagged of course). The production was also impressively added to by the

vintage film clips designed by Mike Wyr. The film element helped the audience walk into the world of the 1940s.

Highlights of the show included the performance (and endless legs) of Emma Byrne performing a fine version of *Lili Marlene*. The comedy double act of Paul D'Orly and Steve Simler, the perky Andrews sisters (although Mr. Andrews might want to have a stern word with the postman and the milkman!) and strong singing from Sean McMullan. Christina Houghton put in a terrific performance and should be congratulated for excellent comic timing throughout.

Individual musical performances were not always quite so successful but this did not detract from the overall charm and feel-good factor of the show.

Director, Michael Mayne should be proud of this show, the scale of which is a huge undertaking. *Happy as a Sandbag* joyfully reminds us of the human stories behind what was, in Churchill's words, the Nation's "finest hour."

Man in the Back Row



Above Steve Simler and Sean McMullan
Left, Emma Byrne.

Portraits by Cathy Neeson

Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

The Tempest - an exciting new collaboration

Network Theatre's RSC Open Stages production of *The Tempest* has generated a huge amount of interest from Networkers and actors from outside alike. There are three massive selling points to this piece. Firstly it is an RSC Open Stages production, which means that Network Theatre, Lion's Mane Theatre and Kipper Tie Theatre have combined forces to pull together a strong production for the RSC Open Stages 2012 programme which could lead to a performance at Stratford Upon Avon. Secondly Bernie Byrnes' adaptation of William Shakespeare's script is genius and offers a real diverse range of parts for both men and women with plenty of cross casting. Thirdly, the team behind this production are a strong, dedicated group with a wealth of stage experience and in the driving seat is Bernie Byrnes herself, an award winning writer and director. Auditions were jam-packed, making the casting one big conundrum.

A taster of the production...

The year is 1962. A revolution is brewing in the back bars and dance halls. The Queen of Naples wields absolute power. The Duke of Milan, Prospero, with his daughter Miranda were banished to a far island, and when his betrayers are shipwrecked he hatches a plot to exact revenge. With intrigue, sexual tension, treason, love and jazz - this is Shakespeare at his best!

Tickets are on sale now through the Network website, www.networktheatre.org. Some dates are already full or busy, so don't delay!



STOP PRESS - Tempest Confirmed for RSC Regional Showcase

Network's joint production of *The Tempest* has been given the prime slot on the opening night of the Royal Shakespeare Company's Open Stages Regional Showcase Festival. We are to present an abridged (one hour) version of the play on 13th April at Questors' Theatre at Ealing.

SEE THE TRAILER - www.networktheatre.org/tempest/

Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

Interview with Keith Wait (Producer) on the upcoming production of *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare. Keith has answered these questions in conjunction with and on behalf of **Bernie Byrnes** who has adapted and directed the production. Interview by Rosie de Vekey

Why did you choose *The Tempest*?

Simply because it is the most interesting of Shakespeare's plays. Its enigmatic content leads to host of possible interpretations. Being WS's last solo play, it also has a sophistication of language and metrical and figurative structure, which gives it a particular beauty.

Quite by coincidence, Bernie and I met in the New Players Theatre during the interval of *Duchess of Malfi* (which was being produced by Hannah Mander, who stage managed the version of *Facades* that I took to Riverside Studios). Our discussion of that production led us to talk about plays of that period and we found out that we both, through our professional companies, had always wanted to produce *The Tempest*.

We later realised that 2012 marked the 400th Anniversary of its first public performance, which was at the Blackfriars Theatre in February 1612.

What can we expect from the production?

Bernie's adaptation puts a very innovative and contemporary spin on Shakespeare's remarkable play, and her production is fresh and exciting approach with imaginative and visually strong staging and a wide use of dance and music. It has humour and spectacle, but combines sensitively and sensuality. You can get some feel of what it looks like on our Facebook page, linked from the Network website www.networktheatre.org/tempest/

Can you tell us more about the musical element to the production?

Music often replaces text, for example the whole scene where Miranda and Ferdinand fall in love becomes a dance, or song may replace song, as with Stephano's drinking song. Since the play is set in the 1962 (with Prospero's island musically marooned in the 1940s) Jim Fowler, our MD, has chosen music of the time, using "art" jazz with the louche feel of the 40's contrasting with the cool jazz of the 60's, but less familiar pieces, giving a feel of separation of the aristocracy and the common people.

How did this collaboration come about?

Following our meeting at the New Players Theatre, Bernie and I began to put together a professional production of *The Tempest* and, since it was to take place in 2012, we signed it up for *Shakespeare 2012*, which is Equity's counter to the Olympics. We already had in place Cheryl Felgate, our choreographer, and three actors, Sally Lofthouse (Miranda), Nigel Williams (Stephano) and myself as Prospero (Bernie having said "because you look like Alec Guinness"!). Then we discovered the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Open Stages* initiative, in which amateur companies, who may work in partnership with others, could apply to put on a show under the RSC's banner. Hence we approached Network, of which we are all Members, to ask if the, now three, companies could collaborate to put in a submission. The NTC Committee welcomed the idea enthusiastically and, since we could mount the production without denting the continuing Network in-house season programme, agreed to submit a proposal to RSC. In March, we found out that we had been successful.

Tell us more about Open Stages

The Royal Shakespeare Company, like Equity, had been concerned about the inroads that the London Olympics were making into funding of (and interest in) theatre. They decided on a "if you can't beat them, join them" tactic. The RSC's idea was a multi-faceted approach to given a wide choice of Shakespeare to international visitors. Part of this was The RSC Open Stages initiative designed to embrace and celebrate amateur theatre, in order to remake the traditional bond with the professional theatre that it felt had been lost during the twentieth century.



Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

The idea of Open Stages is for club theatres throughout the country to mount a Shakespeare or Shakespeare-related theatre event, with the help and promotion of the Royal Shakespeare Company. There are ten Regional groups and ours is centred on the Questors' Theatre in Ealing.

Over the May bank holidays a few of us attended skills exchange workshops with the RSC at Questors. It was great opportunity to work directly with the RSC itself in workshops for actors, directors, designers and technical crew. My own favourite was a workshop by RSC's Michael Corbridge on energising a text.

Take a look at the Open Stages website at www.rsc.org.uk/explore/projects/open-stages

How did you approach your adaptation?

The adaptation is Bernie's baby and we are all enjoying working with her in realising her vision. She is a very inspirational director with clear artistic objectives, brilliant ideas and huge energy.

Her adaptation creates a male-female balance in Shakespeare's play that builds on the complex and troubled back-stories of the familiar protagonists. What emerges from the psychological under-currents of the play is an intriguing rediscovery of the play's core themes.

Why did you choose to set the piece in 1962?

Because it was time of great social change as the austerity of the post-war years took a lurch towards a different world outlook. It was also a time of change in attitudes to sexual matters with, for example the coming of The Pill. This mirrors the situation for Prospero stuck in a world with the thinking of two decades previously, and of Miranda's sexual awakening, as the little world of the island is turned upside-down.

You are using multiple actors to play Ariel. Why is this?

Ariel is a ubiquitous and other worldly creature, so we have one character who may inhabit many places simultaneously. By diffusing Ariel's presence and persona over many actors and dancers, we are not only indicating his omnipresence, but also enhancing the character's magical aspects.

Are there any plans for the production after the Network run?

Excitingly, we have been short-listed to take part in the Regional showcase, which will be performed at Questors' Theatre in Ealing during the period 11th to 28th April. If the RSC like our show and our showcased excerpts, we might be considered for the exceptional opportunity of mounting the show at Stratford-on-Avon during the period 13th to 22nd July, but that still remains a wish-list goal.

It would certainly be good to have the chance, if it is successful, to give the show another outing, as our collaboration seems to be working really well and we have learnt a great deal from each other.



Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

The Writer's Guild Encouragement Award

In December, Nigel Williams and Kay Murray attended a lunch at the Royal Court to receive a Writer's Guild Encouragement Award on behalf of Network Theatre. This award was in recognition of Network's ongoing support of new writing. Each year, Network undertakes at least one piece of new writing and has provided a platform for these plays to be seen and heard.

New writing at Network over the last few years includes Family Ties by Susan Hodgetts (2011), Time for Love by Rosie de Vekey (2010), Happy Chuffing Christmas by Kirsty Eyre (2009), Iff by Andrew N. Hill (2008) and Facades by Keith Wait (2007). Network has also supported new writing by hosting script reading evenings and workshops to aid the writing process.

Susan Hodgetts, who nominated Network, said *'I graduated in January 2011 with a Masters in Writing for Performance from Goldsmiths University. Competition is extremely tough out there for new writers, particularly those who are mature students, which I was. Network Theatre have not only given me the opportunity to put on my first full-length play this September, but every year they have a new writing slot programmed in amongst their works of classic productions. This month they are also thrilled to be previewing two new works for the Edinburgh Fringe by Kirsty Eyre, a new writer whom Network have nurtured for several years. Labelled as an 'am dram' theatre, this theatre is often overlooked for the fantastic work that it does with new writers and the opportunities that it provides for them. I really feel that Network deserve recognition for their support and encouragement, and I believe that their professional but open attitude is taking Network in the direction of being an excellent fringe theatre. I credit them with keeping my motivation afloat at the end of my Masters, and giving me the chance to continue learning, as a writer eventually needs to, by performance.'*

Read more about the awards here:

<http://blogs.thestage.co.uk/shenton/2011/12/encouraging-writers-discouraging-press/>

<http://www.writersguild.org.uk/news-a-features/theatre/228-theatre-encouragement-awards-2011>



Kay and Nigel are hiding
in the back row!

Network Needs...

Are you interested in being an Assistant Director? We are looking for ADs to support the Directors for 2012. If you are interested and wish to find out more, please contact info@networktheatre.org

Network Theatre is looking for a Webmaster who could build and manage an externally-hosted website. Are you interested? If so, please contact info@networktheatre.org

Network Theatre is after a second-hand Apple Mac. If anyone is interested in donating one to the theatre, we would be very grateful. Please contact info@networktheatre.org



Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

We are looking for a new Front of House Manager:

Duties and Responsibilities:

This is a very important role for Network Theatre. Front of House presents our 'public' face to our audiences. It covers all the audience-facing aspects of our theatre, including box office, auditorium and bar, and involves:

- Coordinating all Front of House activities for Network Theatre Company ('Network') productions
- Arranging bar staff for visiting companies (visiting companies provide their own Front of House, but we operate our bar)
- Representing the Front of House department at committee meetings

You will be the head of the Front of House team, responsible for recruiting and training volunteers. You will not, however, be expected to act as Duty Manager every time the theatre is open. A Production FOH Manager is allocated to each Network production for this purpose, and they are responsible for the smooth running of the theatre during their performances. Visiting companies are responsible during their performances.

Are you interested? If so, please contact info@networktheatre.org

Audio-plays

Last year, Network branched out into audio-plays. I believe this was due to the drive of Emma Byrne who adapted a classic Sherlock Holmes story (the Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle) and wondered if Network were up for it, which we were! A reading and audition process followed and ultimately led to an exciting day of recording, a good deal of which was spent sat in a home-made 'tent' on the stage for the ideal acoustics!

At the end of last year, Necropolis Now was recorded (no tent required this time as it is set in Network). A talented cast set about creating a spooky ghost story, again with a day to record.

If you were not able to attend the launches or would like another listen, do tune it at <http://www.networktheatre.org/audioplays.shtml>.

If anyone is interested in directing or writing an audio-play, we would love to hear from you. Finally, a huge thanks to David Harvey, who has recorded and edited both plays and put an enormous effort into the final product that you hear.



Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

The Network Committee

Our club and our theatre require a lot of "behind the scenes" work to manage and maintain them. This falls to the committee to carry out, or to coordinate other volunteers to help. The committee is elected at the AGM and, like others who volunteer, give their time willingly to keep Network running. The current committee is:

Kay Murray - Chair
Judith Denwood - Secretary
David Harvey - Theatre Manager
Keith Wait - Diary Manager
Moirá Cane - Membership Secretary
Natalie Mensah - Treasurer
Kirsty Eyre - Programme Manager
Dan Young - Technical Manager
Robin Lansman - Committee Liaison/Asst FOH Manager
Rosie de Vekey - Newsletter and Publicity
Gaelle Comte - Newsletter and Publicity

The committee always welcomes ideas and proposals for Network activities, and volunteers to help Network with the various tasks. E-mail us at info@networktheatre.org or corner one of us at an event!

All submissions are welcome. Please send to the editor at news@networktheatre.org.
Network Theatre, 246a Lower Road, Waterloo, London SE1 8SJ
For all the latest information go to www.networktheatre.org
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