

Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

June 2012

Dear Networkers,

This month we are delighted to include the review of *Pack of Lies*. We look forward to the forthcoming production of *Henry V*, coming to Network later this month, read our interview with director, Julian Farrance to find out more.

We are looking for more volunteers for the bar and front of house for *Henry V*. Please email info@networktheatre.org to volunteer.

Dates for your diary:

Tickets are on sale for *Henry V* 14th - 23rd June.
See page 6 for our special offer on 18th June.
<http://www.networktheatre.org/HenryV/>

Reading for *The Cherry Orchard* 20th June 7pm.

Love and Deceit - 29th June 7pm. A reading of short plays.

Rosie de Vekey
Editor

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Pack of Lies - A Review by the Man in the Back Row

Terry Wynne directed Hugh Whitmore's fascinating play, *Pack of Lies*. The play is based on the true story of a couple in suburban Ruislip in 1961 who led a double life as Soviet spies. While the production is set in the era in which the events took place, the central themes of the play - deceit and distrust - have as much resonance today as they would have done when the play was originally staged during the Cold War.



Thelma,
played by
March
Fothergill

All
photographs
by
Helen Mason

While 1960s London may have been braced for an attack from the Soviet Union, contemporary London plays out its fears about gang violence, religious terrorism and the riots of the dispossessed on the nightly news. Those same paranoias that existed in the 1960s persist to this day: that an ideologically driven force might attack us for reasons we can barely understand, or that the erosion of the social order might lead to violence and chaos.

The play deftly interweaves these themes, with Stewart (Alastair Callcut), the charming but implacable security officer, representing the certainty of the establishment; Bob (James Laing) as the co-operative member of society who knows their place; and his wife Barbara (Gerry Skeens) as the most conflicted person in the tale who agonises over the moral choices she must make.

James Laing and Gerry Skeens as Bob and Barbara Jackson had the perfect blend of stoic obedience to the "ruling classes" and a desire to stand up to implacable authority. The sexual as well as the international politics were nicely conveyed by the portrayal of the tensions that the Kroger affair had on their marriage.

Alastair Callcut's Stewart portrayed that very British blend of icy Civil Service politeness and sinister threat. Thelma (March Fothergill) provided the warm, human face of the institution that turns the Jackson's lives upside down.



Alistair
Callcut as
Stewart.

Stephanie Okupniak-Vaughan gave an absolutely outstanding performance as Helen Kroger. The tension between the necessary duplicity of her life and the genuine affection she has for the Jacksons was wonderfully nuanced.

Director Terry Wynne made a wise choice to keep the original early 1960s setting, as bringing the play up to date would have made the sexual politics in particular seem strained and false. Designer Helen Mason cleverly created a minimalist, doll's house set that effectively conveyed the place and era with an open stage that heightened the uncomfortable sense of voyeurism and surveillance.

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Huge congratulations to the Director, cast and crew for a highly enjoyable and entertaining show.



Bob, Julie and Barbara have breakfast.



Network AGM

Network held their AGM on Thursday 7th June. Many thanks to everyone who was able to attend. For those who were not, here are the selected highlights.

Chair, Kay Murray thanked all our members for a successful and busy year featuring a wide range of shows. She highlighted our continued commitment to new writing and this year, Network presented *Family Ties*, *Necropolis Now* (audioplay) and *A Long Night in London*. Kay thanked everyone who made this possible including our actors, front-of-house, backstage crew, set designers, costumiers and of course, our audience. She especially welcomed the new members who have joined in the last year.

With regard to the proposed theatre move, there has been no further news, so we are continuing as normal!

Treasurer Natalie Mensah presented the accounts to the meeting, which were audited by Eileen Heaney and accepted by those in attendance.

Secretary Judith Denwood dissolved the current committee and a vote was held for the new committee. We offer thanks to those committee members stepping down this year (Natalie Mensah, David Harvey, Robin Lansman and Rosie de Vekey) for all their hard work. We now welcome the new committee:

Kay Murray - Chair
Judith Denwood - Secretary
Dan Young - Premises Manager
Keith Wait - Diary Manager
Moirra Cane - Membership Secretary
Sean McMullan - Treasurer
Kirsty Eyre - Programming
Sue Walker - FOH Manager
Cathy Neeson - Marketing

The new committee will need assistance with their new roles. If you would be interested in helping with any of the above, please contact info@networktheatre.org.

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An Interview with Julian Farrance, Director of Henry V

Why Henry V?

I picked Henry V because it is my favourite Shakespeare play and has been since I first saw the Olivier film version (taking over from Macbeth which had been my favourite since school). As an actor, the daring-do and fantastic speeches drew me to it but I think maybe my work as a military museum curator, where I deal with the subject matter of soldiers has strengthened my appreciation of the piece. It is a fantastic study of men under the duress of prolonged campaigning and combat. The situations, the emotions, the very words in the mouths of the officers and men in Harry's army ring utterly true to anyone who has studied the history of the British Army. Incidentally I fully subscribe to the theory that the playwright was either a soldier or had performed some extremely in depth research to have such familiarity with his topic. Ultimately I chose this piece because it was the one I felt I could bring the most to. One of my former directors (of whom there are four appearing in this play!) said to me that "if you're going to put on Shakespeare you should try and bring something new to it," and by setting it in the Napoleonic era this is what I have tried to do.



Stephen Lee and
Company.

Photograph by
Andy Bradshaw.

Why did you choose to set it during the Napoleonic wars?

Because war is such a constant presence in the world and because, as I said, this piece is such a fantastic study of men in combat, it is constantly updated to illustrate whatever theme the director wishes to explore. So Olivier's film is a patriotic recruiting piece, where Brannagh's is obviously anti-war highlighting the mud, blood and slaughter. Henry has seen action in the trenches of the Great War and the dusty plains of Afghanistan, all of which are valid explorations of the theme of war but the text clearly indicates that the enemy of the piece are the French. So, fascinating as it may be to have a sandy-camouflaged King addressing his speeches to TV news crews, this makes no sense when the enemy are French. It seemed clear to me that the most appropriate era both theatrically and historically was that of the Napoleonic wars. In fact, the 17th Century language of Shakespeare's London with its talk of linstocks, pistols and gunstones is actually more appropriate to the 18th and 19th Centuries, where we have set our version, than to the 100 Years War. Of course, if I had known how much work would be involved in fabricating 30 odd English and French uniforms, equipment and weapons, I may have thought again (as a note to budding directors,

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if you plan to put on full-scale costume dramas, first secure a partner who will commit months of their lives to helping you make costumes and who will permit you to turn their house into a tailor's shop).

You have abridged the text; talk us through your version of the play.

The published versions of all of Shakespeare's plays contain every scrap of written material that was used in the 17th Century. To try and use all of it would produce a play about three and half hours long. So, I have trimmed quite a lot out to bring it down to a more manageable two hours 15 minutes (as the groundlings at the Globe would have expected). One whole scene has gone and all of the others have had a bit of pruning (hopefully not so that you would notice). The Chorus has had some speeches moved around to make the abridgement flow more easily and Pistol doesn't have to eat any leeks! Oddly, I have found it necessary to add some material from *Henry IV* parts I and II. The character of Falstaff is such an all-pervasive force in the early part of the play and yet never appears. This is of course because Shakespeare's audience would have been familiar with him and his colleagues: Pistol, Nell, Bardolf, Nym and the Boy, from the earlier plays. A modern audience would not necessarily share that familiarity so I felt it necessary to give Sir John a brief cameo (in this, I need hardly add, I am not original). Finally to fit more with the 19th Century setting, I have shifted a number of the soldiers' ranks from Captains to Sergeants.

Who have you cast in the lead role? How will he be playing it?

Mr. Stephen Lee will be appearing in his third role for the company. Network audiences will be familiar with Stephen from last year's *Road* and from his superb performance as Romeo in *Romeo & Juliet*. Henry is often portrayed as a martial superman, a combination of Wellington, Churchill and Rambo, but a closer examination of the script reveals a young man torn by conflicting emotion. Obviously undervalued as a wastrel by his father he is over compensating to become "the mirror of all Christian kings". He is clearly motivated as much by anger as by political expediency in declaring war and occasionally the mask will slip to show the self-doubt and concern at carrying the confidence of all his subject. So, a complex job for a young actor. Fortunately in Stephen we have a player well up to the challenge, so he has produced a believable portrayal of a young man carrying great responsibility. I should add that I have been very fortunate in all of the company of players and crew we have assembled for *Henry V*. All have shown immense talent, enthusiasm and commitment to the production.



Stephen Lee as Henry.

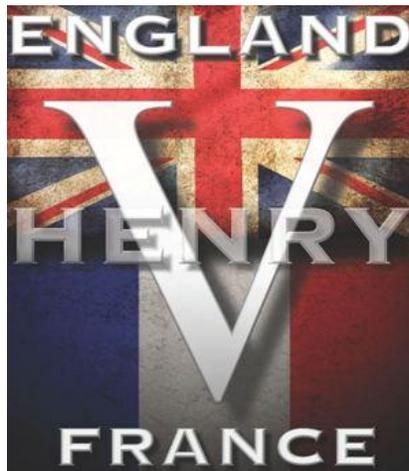
Photographs by Andy Bradshaw.

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What are the challenges of this production?

Aside from producing the uniforms, equipment and weapons, the challenges have been making a working cannon, building a pub and convincingly hanging Bardolf, essentially the same challenges facing any Napoleonic General. Like all successful officers I have relied on the troops to pull it off.



STOP PRESS: Monday 18th June is Waterloo Day. To celebrate the anniversary of the battle and tie in with the setting of our production, tickets for this date will include a free glass of fizz on arrival to raise a toast and “cry God for Harry, England and St George!”...And the Duke of Wellington. Huzzah! Buy tickets for the Waterloo Day performance and celebration at <http://www.networktheatre.org/HenryV/>

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
Dan Young - Premises Manager
Keith Wait - Diary Manager
Maira Cane - Membership Secretary

Sean McMullan - Treasurer
Kirsty Eyre - Programming
Sue Walker - FOH Manager
Cathy Neeson - Marketing

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.

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

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