

# NETWORKING

## The Newsletter of the Network Theatre Company

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WWW.NETWORKTHEATRE.ORG



May 2009



The cast of *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown* clutch their comfort blankets  
Photograph by Paul Lunnon with thanks

Dear Networkers,

I hope this newsletter finds you in high spirits. This Spring edition of *Networking* is packed with photos and reviews (congratulations to the cast and crew of **An Ideal Husband** and **You're a Good Man Charlie Brown**) in addition to a sneak preview of **A Midsummer Night's Dream**.

There are plenty of opportunities this year at Network both on and off stage - just check out the **Dates for your Diary** section: **Network Theatre's 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** event, managed by Keith Wait, is one such opportunity. We now have a dozen people interested in being part of the gala party on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October. If you would like to add your party piece to the cabaret or be involved in its organisation, there is an open meeting at The Network Theatre at 7pm on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> June. See page seven for details on the Special 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Evening – many thanks to Keith for arranging.

Our AGM will be held on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> July. See page four for more details from Kay Murray.

Enjoy!

Kirsty, The Editor

**All submissions are welcome.**

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**An Ideal Husband by Oscar Wilde  
A Review by James McKendrick**



The opening of John Osborne's *Look Back In Anger* in 1956, has been cited as the moment when, for better or worse, British theatre was lifted out of the drawing room and set down firmly in the austerity of post-war Britain. It is easy to imagine that this development and the sometimes scabrous, but frequently exhilarating, arc that theatre in this country has followed since might have set Oscar Wilde spinning in his handsome Pere Lachaise mausoleum. It is certainly not fanciful to imagine that Wilde might have greeted the idea of placing an ironing board centre stage with the sort of disdain that Lady Bracknell reserved for handbags as baby carriers.

There can be few playwrights whose works have remained so firmly planted in the drawing room as Wilde, at least when considering his quartet of comedies. They have endured nevertheless, and the fact that they are so often performed and filmed may be testimony to their sparkling wit and their interest as a period piece in portraying a vision of London that is recognisable and yet utterly different from the city we live in today. Wilde's personal tragedy and his posthumous rehabilitation and lionising by many in the late twentieth century have also sometimes lent his comedies, with their frequent themes of double lives, secrets and indiscretions, a level of poignancy and depth that they were specifically criticised for lacking by critics when they first appeared.

All of this is basically to say that you know what you are getting with a Wilde comedy – dazzling wit, shards of spite coated in honey and epigrams that generally follow the pattern of one character slightly inverting or subverting the proposition delivered by another. You are unlikely to be surprised or challenged and you will probably experience a frisson of recognition, even when seeing one of the comedies for the first time.

Thus, Zoe Hart's production of the penultimate Wilde comedy, *An Ideal Husband*, opens in the reassuringly familiar surroundings of the Grosvenor Square home of Sir Robert Chiltern. This opening scene is handled with some style, introducing the characters in the play, who enter and peel off into gossiping cabals, whilst the main action takes place downstage, effectively evoking the ambience of a grand society function.

The spirit of Wilde is also evident early on in the delicious interplay between Eleni Young and Isobel Henderson as Lady Basildon and Mrs Marchmont respectively. The chemistry between these two and their interaction with the other characters, set the tone for the play marvellously and it was a great shame that these characters disappear from the action shortly afterwards. Eleni, in particular, fluttered her fan with enough kinetic energy to power a small town, perfectly suggesting being formally attired on a balmy summer evening – quite an achievement, given the goose bumps that she was probably experiencing on a chilly February night down the Network Arch. Miranda Harrison, as Lady Markby, also makes much of the early comic running in the play. As the grande dame of polite society, she generates much laughter with her disdainful view of the younger generation and the decline in standards.

As is the case in most Wilde comedies, the plot is almost incidental, largely providing the context for driving the various characters together and providing the leaping off point for their ensuing verbal sparring. In this case, the central issue is the arrival at the Chiltern's function of Mrs Cheveley, carrying with her the accusation that Sir Robert, the Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, had earlier in his career used government secrets for his own personal gain. Mrs Cheveley seeks to blackmail him with this knowledge to alter government policy to her own advantage.

Sean McMullan, as Sir Robert Chiltern and Christina Houghton as his wife have the rather thankless task of carrying the moral centre of the play, whilst the other characters get to detonate the verbal firecrackers of Wilde's wit all around them. However, they despatch this task well, driving the plot forward and providing a good counterpoint against which the other characters can play.

As Sir Robert's tormenter, Mrs Cheveley, Rosie de Vekey, takes on a role that she could have been born to play. Whether prowling the stage with feline menace, delivering acidic taunts or sugar-coating the spite in a faux innocence, it was clear that she was relishing every barbed syllable of Wilde's text.

The plot brings Mrs Cheveley together with her former lover Lord Goring, played by Indrojit Banerji. There can have been few Network debuts quite as striking as Banerji's performance as the indolent charmer. Every scene he appears in crackles with wit and he displays effortless charisma and stage presence, whether languidly draping himself over the furniture or making a wonderful entrance, casually tossing his cane to his servant without breaking stride. The scenes between Lord Goring and his servant, Phipps (Kevin Healy deadpanning to wonderfully comic effect) were delightful. In the exchanges between the two, Healy strikes a perfect balance between respect and disdain and this, combined with Banerji's bemused reactions – never quite sure whether or not he is being mocked – get the second half of the play off to a strong start.

Another rich vein of humour is to be found in the scenes between Lord Goring and his father Lord Caversham (played by Terry Wynne). Caversham continually chastises his son for his failure to take a wife and his inability to make anything of himself. These are richly comic scenes and they elicit much laughter from the Network audience. However, although still extracting much of the humour from the text, Wynne's performance was a little restrained and only occasionally hit the heights of bombast that fully exploited the comic potential of the situation.

As Miss Mabel Chiltern, Nicci Marsh showed marvellous comic timing, her blatant flirting to get the attention of Lord Goring early in the play passing completely unnoticed to the self-absorbed dandy. Equally hilarious was her change of tack in the final act, snubbing her beloved and finally securing the proposal of marriage that her more available approach had signally failed to deliver.

The pace and energy of the production is sustained through to the conclusion, which predictably sees Mrs Cheveley getting her comeuppance and the various couples in the play being reconciled or finally coming together. Therefore, you know what you are getting with a Wilde comedy and you get what you expect. Nothing surprising, nothing challenging but a thoroughly entertaining evening. The play may not have been the most adventurous choice to open Network's seventieth anniversary season, but when it is conceived and executed as stylishly as this, it would be churlish to complain too much.

**Lord Goring (Indrojit Banerji) with Mabel Chiltern (Nicci Marsh)  
below left and Lord Caversham (Terry Wynne) right.  
Photos by Zoe Hart with thanks.**



## You're a Good Man Charlie Brown A Review by Richard Burgess

As a man, generally allergic to musicals, I was surprised to be asked to review this show.

Just as surprised was the Editor, I suppose, when this eventually landed in her inbox \*only\* 3 days late.

However, the production surpassed my expectations, which have been low ever since the childhood trauma of being forced to attend Me and my Girl starring Gary Wilmot.



**Jenna Vik as Sally**  
**Photograph by Paul Lunnon with thanks**

The stage at Network has rarely been as busy with the use of scaffolding, a big brick wall and a tastefully concealed drum kit. The cast, imitating the well-known and loved characters of the Peanuts cartoon, sang the eponymous opening number with gusto, and then came the opportunity for the first solo number, sung by Lucy-“Schroeder”. As she serenaded Barry Clarke, who was dressed in an Andy Warhol wig for the occasion, it became apparent that Lisa Rost-Welling is quite a talent. As well as the vocal pipes she played the bossy Lucy to a T.

This was followed by Sally’s discourse on her skipping rope, and Linus’ (Tim Berryman-nice work) blanket obsession, in which the cast joined in.

Charlie Brown, played by Sean McMullen, now a familiar face in Network circles (and originally played by Radar from M\*A\*S\*H\* fact fans) flew his kite and lamented the predictable results with a strong baritone. He also possesses the sensitive rounded features of Schultz’s hero, and a perfectly delivered “good grief” which used to end many of the cartoon strips. He is then ritually humiliated by Lucy (“The Doctor is IN”), before Barry took the stage with his showstopper “Beethoven Day”.

The second half belonged to Snoopy (Andy McGuire-arf! arf!-he’ll understand), his flights of fancy (“The Red Baron”) and his love of food (“Supertime”), along with Sally (Jenna Vik-another great talent imported from Schultz’s homeland) and yet another hapless Charlie Brown number (this time concerning his ability, or lack of it, in baseball). He really must do something about talking to that little Redheaded girl but he cannot bring himself to risk a crushed ego, and his desperation is disheartening, yet somehow familiar to anyone who has been a seven year old boy.

The leads were ably augmented by the Little Red Haired Girl played by Joanna Bunnell, Mary Groom as Marcie: - Peppermint Patty was played by Nathalie Tafelmacher, and Frieda played by Sharan Hunjan. Woodstock was operated by Rhyll Davies, another great bit of “Deus ex Machina” by Gary Cross. The band and MD (Simon Thompson, Peter Jewell and Lyndsay Barnbrook) deserve a big hand, as does the indefatigable director, Michael Mayne.

The final number, “Happiness” was by far the strongest number in terms of the score and something to leave the audience with a smile on their faces. I’m a big fan, Charlie Brown.

### **A Message from Kay Murray, our Chairman**

Our AGM will take place on **Wednesday 29th July** (formal notice to follow). There will be vacancies on committee, including the posts of Secretary and Membership Secretary. If you are interested in joining the committee or filling the above mentioned posts, please let me know. I am happy to discuss the set-up of the committee and the vacant positions with you.

Kay Murray, Chairman  
e-mail : [david.34murray@btinternet.com](mailto:david.34murray@btinternet.com)

## A Midsummer Night's Dream- an Interview with Andy Bradshaw, Director

### 1. Wow, A Midsummer Night's Dream over Midsummer. Sounds magical. What inspired you?

As Network regulars will be aware, I am a huge lover of Shakespeare's works. I get frustrated going to see many so-called professional productions many of which I think are absolutely lousy, with gabbled lines and poor interpretation. So, frustrated with this and combined with a lack of companies doing Shakespeare which I could act in, I decided to direct this year. I chose A Midsummer Night's Dream because it is one of the most accessible of his plays. I am also sick to death of the "fluffy" productions of the play. There's a lot of darkness in there mixed with the comedy, which I will be looking to bring out.

### 2. You're presented with the challenge of distinguishing between the world of humans and that of fairies. How will you portray this on stage?

The answer is simple - you don't. The human world and the fairy world are interlinked. At the time the play was written there was a great belief in fairy folk so plays involving them would, at the time, have been seen as the sci-fi/fantasy blockbusters that are so beloved today in theatre and cinema. More importantly, the text gives the director permission to intermingle them. At the opening, we learn that because Oberon and Titania have fallen out, things are going wrong in nature. Puck plays mischievous games with humans, but not only that, the interaction between the human and fairy world is continued right up to Puck's last speeches. The connection between nature and super-nature is made in many of Shakespeare's plays whether it be The Tempest or the Scottish play or others.

### 3. How have you matched Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius?

The difficulty of matching the lovers presents its own challenges. The main one is differentiating the characters of Demetrius and Lysander as they are written very similarly. I believe that I have been able to separate out the two so they don't come over as rather bland. Whilst there is often complaint that there aren't enough great roles for women, I believe that is not the case with Helena and Hermia. I have been blessed with two great actresses to play these beautifully written parts. And yes, of course, Helena is taller than Hermia. Quite a lot taller in fact.. in fact she's taller than me too by quite a bit! (Mind you, that's not saying much... if only I'd taken my Mum's advice and eaten more sprouts when I was a kid.... mutter mutter....)

### 4. How would you rate the Rom/Com ratio of your production? Will we laugh or weep with delight?

It is a romantic comedy yes and yes I hope you will be laughing. The lovers scenes are very funny as are, in fact the rude mechanicals scenes. I have a wonderful motley crew for our hempen homespuns, which I hope will tickle with vigour the ribs of the audience. Suture kits may have to be on standby for splitting sides I hope...

### 5. Does your Bottom look big on stage?

I don't know, you'd have to ask audiences who have seen me in previous productions! As to AMND, my Bottom is actually rather lean in fact. And with a great sense of comic timing. So I hope people will laugh at my Bottom.

### 6. Did you overcome your special effects and life-sized tree construction dilemma as reported at the committee meeting? If not, how can people help?

Yes, I think so, the very wonderful Jo Bunnell has plugged into my vision for the scenery. Because I want the production to move quickly, I am using a fixed set which means no scenery changes, which hold up productions all too often in my opinion. I am aiming for a production where the audience always has something happening, so the cast attention and focus is all important to ensure fluid changes between scenes. The set and lighting I have planned will, I hope make the production look magical and fantastical where needed.

As to special effects, I need a silent method of getting lots of dry ice on stage very quickly and am still looking at options for doing this.

### 7. I understand you've a fine flock of fairies. How is your super-natural choreography coming along?

The show features a number of choreographed sequences, including dance (fairies take delight in dance and music). I have written a sequence into the beginning of the show which I hope will be both visually stunning, aurally arresting and more importantly introduces the direct relationship between the fairy and human worlds. Choreography is by Zoe Bradshaw - yes, she is my daughter, but not given the role through Nepotism but on merit. Anyone who has ever seen her on stage would understand why she is choreographing the show - indeed you will have chance to do exactly that as she is in the show... It's a mixed ability group in terms of dance

experience so the dance elements will be adapted accordingly. The last show Zoe was in at Network Theatre was eight years ago, when she choreographed A Taming Of The Scrooge - when she was ten!

#### 8. How are you finding directing your first show?

Hard work but I am enjoying it immensely. I've read and re-read the play countless times. I've spent hours editing music. Then there's the sheer amount of knowledge required to have the characterisations of all the characters in the production loaded in my head at all times. I've found the transition from acting to directing fairly smooth to be honest, but then my day job as a photographer involves a great deal of direction and thinking of every angle, so I think that may have helped. That and the fact that I love Shakespeare so much. I'm already working on a production of Henry V which I intend to direct in the next year or so...

#### 9. What are the main challenges of this production?

The biggest challenge is getting everybody to the level of text delivery I am looking for. I make no bones about it, unless the text is understood and delivered well, Shakespeare can fall on its backside. I hate hearing the "taught" method of delivery where the text and the words are suffocated under the flabby weight of convention. It is possible to deliver Shakespeare conversationally and naturally whilst still adhering to the basic framework and theory behind Iambic Pentameter. If this is achieved, then what happens is that understanding of the text, even to the uninitiated becomes transparent.

The next challenge is has been music. This is going to be a loud production, make no mistake about it, so, I have custom edited pieces and some music is being custom written for the show. It's quite handy having a brother (Roger) who is a rock musician and recording artist, not to mention a very talented song-writer...

#### 10. Do you see yourself as king or queen of the fairies?

Is this a reference to my cross-dressing antics as Queen Anne in "The Three Musketeers"? I would like to state as a matter of public record that I don't wear women's clothes, except in public and when it's appropriate. Mind you, I've just remembered, I left the sling backs I wore in that production in the back arch... I must remember to pick them up sometime. You never know when a pair of nice high heels might be needed...

<b>Dates for your Diary 2009 (at Network Theatre unless otherwise stated)</b>	
Open meeting on Network's 70 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary gala with Keith Wait	<b>7pm, Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> June</b>
Network's 70 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration	<b>Bar from 6pm. Tables at 7pm. Carriages at 11:00pm, Friday 26<sup>th</sup> June: Tamesa Restaurant, Oxo Tower</b>
Reading of Remember Me	<b>6.30pm for 7.00pm, Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> July</b>
Performances of A Midsummer Night's Dream	<b>7.30pm, Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> July</b>
Auditions for Remember Me	<b>6.30pm, Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> &amp; Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> July</b>
AGM	<b>7.30pm, Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> July</b>
Reading of Happy F***ing Christmas	<b>6.30pm for 7.00pm, Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September</b>
Auditions for Happy F***ing Christmas	<b>6.30pm, Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> &amp; Friday 11<sup>th</sup> September</b>
Performances of Remember Me	<b>7.30pm, Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> – Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> September</b>
Performances of Happy F***ing Christmas	<b>7.30pm, Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> – Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> December</b>

# Network Seventieth Anniversary Celebrations

## Platinum Anniversary Dinner in the sumptuous Thameside setting of the Oxo Tower

Friday 26<sup>th</sup> June 2009

Join the celebrations to commemorate Network Theatre's 70<sup>th</sup> year in a fitting style, with a four-course dinner in the private dining suite of Tamesa restaurant in the Oxo Tower, a glamorous venue in a riverside setting near our theatre.

We will have an exclusive private dining room, bar and balcony overlooking the Thames, where Tamesa's resident chef has prepared the following menu:

*Amuse bouche:*

Roast butternut squash, basil pesto;

*Starter:*

Salad of pea shoots, bean medley, mint and pecorino cheese  
or pressed confit duck terrine with pistachio, fig compote;

*Main:*

Caramelised fillets of sole with lentils and spinach, baby onions, light tarragon jus  
Or braised shoulder of lamb, kale and pancetta, salsify puree, jus de rosemary;

*Dessert:*

Passion fruit crème brulee  
or selected artisan cheeses, biscuits & pear chutney.

*Filter coffee*

This menu may be subject to seasonal changes.

Vegetarian or special dietary requirements are available on request.

**The cost is £35 per head, exclusive of bar.**

Bar from 6pm. **Tables at 7pm.** Carriages at 11:00pm.  
Recommended dress code is lounge suit, cocktail dresses

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**To reserve your place** please return the attached slip with a cheque by **5<sup>th</sup> June** to:

Network Dinner  
The Tun Bridge House  
150 Hampton Road  
Twickenham  
Middlesex  
TW2 5QR

*You will receive an acknowledgement by e-mail with a menu pre-order card.*

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Please reserve ..... places for the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner at Tamesa for

Name ..... Guest's name .....

Address .....

.....

Phone contact ..... E-mail .....

Special dietary requirements

.....

I enclose a cheque for £35 (single place) or £70 (two places), payable to Network Theatre Company.