

Networking

Network Theatre Company's Newsletter

September 2011

Dear Networkers,

Welcome to the September newsletter.

Apologies for the absence of the newsletter in recent months, sorry for the delays - we are now back!

This month we are delighted to include reviews of the fantastic recent shows *Road* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Congratulations to all involved.

Dates for your diary this month:

Auditions for *Happy as a Sandbag* - 13th and 14th September

Family Ties Performances - 21st - 24th September

Looking a little further ahead, the first play for next year is *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare. The reading will be at 3pm (note earlier time) on 16th October 2011.

The premiere and launch of our new audio play *Necropolis Now* will take place on 29th October 2011 and promises to be a great night.

Rosie de Vekey & Gaelle Comte
Editors

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Romeo and Juliet - a review

"Romeo & Juliet" still feels like one of Shakespeare's more contemporary works, thanks to its continued re-invention in "West Side Story" and in modern cinema reinterpretations from the likes of Baz Luhrmann.

Director Andy Bradshaw has fashioned a thrilling, moving and timeless reading of the star-crossed lovers. The verse is well spoken, though some actors' natural speaking styles, such as Nigel Williams' Lord Capulet, are well suited to expressing the clear diction needed. Although Julian Farrant brought genuine light and shade to Friar Laurence, I found his mumbling difficult to decipher at times. Similarly the Northern accent deployed by Alison Rycroft's Nurse, whilst giving comic opportunities, made whole passages unintelligible - maybe I've been away from the North too long!

Stephen Lee as Romeo and Lauren Edwards as Juliet are both superb, in turn being amusing, thoughtful and intensely believable, thoroughly convincing as the tortured teenage lovers. The wider acting ensemble faithfully recreated a genuine sense of family loyalties and conflicts, with particular praise to Sue Small's Lady Capulet who brought just the right touch of inner-conflict to the diverse tensions of wife and mother.

The direction was suitably brisk, avoiding what the Director described as "numb buttocks" syndrome. However, I would've liked Romeo's reaction at being told of Juliet's supposed demise

to have carried more feeling, as the scene felt rushed. What was impressive was how Juliet's competing tensions of her love for Romeo, versus the horror of the murder of her cousin supposedly at her lover's hand, was brought simmering to the surface. I also liked how Romeo is seen deliberately killing Tybalt, removing any possible doubt as to Romeo's anger at the death of his kinsman, Mercutio.



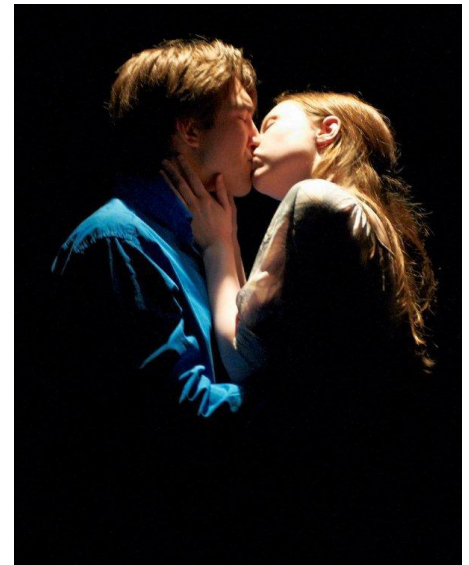
Gareth Kearns as Mercutio

Gareth Kearns brought a dandyish flair to Mercutio, though Tom Martin could've curbed his tendencies to play Paris in the style of Edmund Blackadder! Special mention must go to Sacha Walker who essayed two super cameos as narrator at the beginning and end, as well as a memorably sinister Apothecary. Jennie Rich also made the most of her several appearances, proving that featured players can create a similar impact to the more traditional leads.

The costumes seemed of a recent era, though music from the likes of K.d.Lang and Tom Jones was distinctly modern - however, the sound of Snoop Dogg in the Ball scene was a bit distracting. The lighting helped to create the right mood, especially the single spot given to Juliet in her closing speech after bidding farewell to her father. The stage blocks were used to great effect in several scenes and were skilfully manoeuvred by the actors whether being used as props, or being placed in readiness for the ensuing action. Performing in the round made the experience feel utterly real.

An excellent and intelligent evening of theatre, congratulations are due to the entire cast and crew.

David Hodgson



Stephen Lee and Lauren Edwards

Photographs by Paul H Lunnon

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Road - a review

By Susan Hodgetts

James McKendrick's spirited production kicked off with Julian Farrance's Scullery introducing us to a Road somewhere in the North of England, and then guiding us giddily through its maze of inhabitants and their stories.

All of these hard-drinking potty mouths had one thing in common: sadness and a frantic yearning to escape their poverty-stricken existences in the wake of the 80s steel collapse. Until they can figure a way out, they're plain desperate: whether it's shagging anything that moves, looting a seemingly empty flat that's actually occupied, or going on hunger strike for a reason they can't even fathom themselves - except that there's nothing else to do.

Road was a noisy, larger-than-life beast of a production, making the quieter moments all the more lucid and beautiful. These rare oases of reflection resulted in two genuinely affecting moments: Clare singing Sam Cooke's *Wonderful World* to her boyfriend Joey ("Don't know much about history...but I do know that I love you") as they are both dying from a hunger strike, and Louise, Carol, Brink and Eddie suddenly stopping their evening of drinking to take notice of Otis Redding's *Try a Little Tenderness*.

Although Road's hard hitting manifesto and the shocking ending of Joey's story left the audience gasping at the end of the first half, all were enormously cheered by the interval entertainment. Presided over by Road's DJ Bisto rocking an 80s disco, Scullery's raucous rendition of Jailhouse Rock livened up the karaoke contest. The dance trio The Electric Clutch was equally hilarious and warmed the audience up for what became the favourite scene of the night: a comatose drunken soldier being romanced by a deluded Helen in a scene of sad hilarity that showed just how desperate these people were for humanity to reach out and touch them.

McKendrick's staging made efficient use of the auditorium space in order to engage the audience as far as possible, not only by turning the theatre into a mecca of Northern pub entertainment but also encouraging audience participation at the right points between key scenes. A uniformly outstanding and well-drilled cast operated with clear purpose of action and character throughout.



Road, which was Jim Cartwright's first play, demonstrates an impressive dynamism and ear for human suffering and reveals that there is a powerful voice to be heard. However, some of the monologues in the first half in particular could now do with a hefty edit. At least a good ten minutes could be lost from the beginning of the Joey/Clare hunger strike scene for example, but these are issues with the dramaturgy of the original play.

All in all, a committed performance that allowed an outstanding cast to shine.



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Network Theatre itself is the spooky site of this new audio-play. Q&A with Rosie de Vekey, Writer and Director of Necropolis Now

Interview by *The Undertaker*

Rosie de Vekey talks about her new production, an audio-play written for the Network Theatre.

The Undertaker: So, tell us about the play - what is it about?

Rosie de Vekey: *Necropolis Now* is about a play being rehearsed in Network Theatre, which for anyone who has locked up on their own late at night, can be a bit of a spooky place. Let's just say, after a while some odd things begin to happen.

TU: Where did the idea come from?

RD: I was interested in finding a ghost story to do with Waterloo and after doing a bit of research I discovered the history of the Necropolis line.

TU: The Necropolis Line? Tell us more?

RD: I don't want to give too much away, but the Necropolis Line was known as 'the train of the dead' and it really did run from Waterloo station. You'll have to listen to the play to find out more.

TU: So after *Time for Love*, why have you gone for an audio-play this time?

RD: I knew I wanted to do a ghost story written for Network that was set in the space but I wasn't sure what. When I started writing, it seemed to develop naturally into an audio-play. Also, for me, like a lot of Network members, a lighter rehearsal schedule is ideal at the moment. I hope we have more members putting forward ideas for audio-plays as it is a great way to get involved with the company without having to commit to the rehearsal schedule of one of our stage productions. Also, for those who have listened to the fantastic *The Adventure of the Blue Carbunkle*, you can see what can be achieved.

TU: How did writing for radio compare to writing for the stage?

RD: I really enjoyed the experience and hopefully the piece will work. I certainly had to reign myself in from adding lots of characters, just so that the audience can keep up with who is who. I am looking

forward to adding the sound effects and creeping up the final cut.

TU: The play is set in Network. Are the characters based on any familiar faces?

RD: I think anyone writing is influenced by the people they know, but no, with the exception of one character who makes a brief cameo, everyone is entirely fictional. Although the character of the Director in *Necropolis Now* is possibly my evil alter-ego! The cast has been warned...

TU: So, what can we expect from the premiere evening (29th October 2011)?

RD: Well, as well as being the first opportunity to hear the play before anyone else, we will be adding a visual element to the production to add to the whole experience. As the night is as close to Halloween as we can get, we hope to give you a chilling performance.



***Necropolis Now* premieres at Network on 29th October 2011. Come if you dare!**

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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

The Committee 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

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

Network Theatre is looking for a cleaner. If anyone is interested or can recommend someone, please contact info@networktheatre.org

Programme for 2012

We have a fantastic range of shows planned for 2012, so please do get involved. If you are new to Network, just come along to one of our readings and find out more.

The Tempest by William Shakespeare
Harvey by Mary Chase
Breaking the Code by Hugh Whitmore
Henry V by William Shakespeare
An Evening of One-Act Plays
The Cherry Orchard by Anton Chekhov
Fairy Tales of New York by J.P. Donleavy

The Network Committee

Kay Murray
Judith Denwood
David Harvey
Keith Wait
Moirá Cane
Natalie Mensah
Kirsty Eyre
Lesley Winterflood
Dan Young
Robin Lansman
Rosie de Vekey
Gaelle Comte

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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