

Coming in June

'The Servant'
by Robin Maugham

Directed by
Ken Potter

18-25 June

Box Office (24hr)
01273 746118
Other enquiries
01273 808353

NEW VENTURE THEATRE
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Two productions for BRIGHTON FESTIVAL MONTH

'All My Sons'

By Arthur Miller
Directed by James Newton
7-21 May 2011

For my Father and my Son

Choosing a play can be a cathartic experience if you stop to look closely at the choice you have made. After all, if everything happens for a reason and fate is really with us all the way, then perhaps my choice of play for the New Venture this year, is also thus influenced.

Photo by adambronckhurst.com



L-R - Lynn Fernee, Tim Blisset,
Matthew Lawson

Miller wrote *All My Sons*, his second play, in 1947 after his first play quite literally bombed on Broadway and was pulled after only 4 performances. He decided that he had nothing to lose. He was as low as he could be in terms of being accepted as a playwright and so he set about giving himself a final throw of the dice. (There's that fate thing again). He would attempt one more play and if this failed he would give up the idea of being a playwright and find something else to do. Judge for yourself tonight whether you think he made the right choice.

For me, this is one of the best plays written in the last century. It's main criticism is that it is in many ways too perfectly written. But you know, as far as criticisms go, I'd be happy with that. Undoubtedly influenced by Chekov, Ibsen and Greek mythology, Miller explores the themes of social versus corporate responsibility interwoven within a family drama that centres on the relationship between a father and his son. Throw into the mix

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'Four Play'

By Andrew Allen
Directed by Steve Coulson
25-30 May 2011

I'm very excited and proud to be part of a very vibrant season that includes new writing at the New Venture Theatre. Established pieces are important, of course, and essentially form the backbone of much of our theatre-going experience, but discovering something new can be invigorating, sexy and dynamic.

Which is not to say that the phrase 'new writing' can be a deadly one for many, even those who actively seek it out: will it be too worthy? Will it be too wordy? Too



Back row, left to right - Phillip Hill, Sam Andersen,
Frank Leon and Sarah Charsley

Front Row - never seen them before in my life

political? Will it even (whisper this) be any good? Add to that the fear that your average audience has when faced with a piece of new writing that's being directed by the author, and it's time for everyone to gird their loins.

I'm lucky then, if humble, and even a little terrified, to be producing a show of new writing that follows in the recent footsteps of some excellent examples of the genre - we've had Jonathan Brown's *The Well*, and just last month, the great double-bill of *Fake* and *Lie With Me*. Being witness to those productions has given me the strength - and, I felt, the permission, to be able to offer up my own script for perusal. There's no concerns about this particular

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Photo by strat@mastoris.com

the American Dream and war-time profiteering and you have a very potent mix - one which resonates loud and clear today. If we are to learn anything from art and culture it is that it must "hold as 'twere a mirror up to nature."

My own personal journey in working on this play has led me to Miller's ideal which he hints at heavily in the play, is that we are not just Fathers to our own sons; but we must be Fathers to all children - I feel it's a bond that women already recognise and men need to catch up on.

"Be careful to leave your sons well instructed rather than rich, for the hopes of the instructed are better than the wealth of the ignorant. "

Epictetus

James Newton

play being too political or worthy - it's called *Four Play*, after all - although the cast would certainly have a case if they complained that it was too wordy. In the end, though, I hope that we can prove that new writing can - whatever else it's supposed to achieve - be *fun*.

This process has been made a lot easier - a pleasure, even - by a hugely supportive and encouraging company. By 'company', I mean the whole thing: The New Venture Theatre. Don't get me wrong: this isn't the contractual obligation, the standard party line from a new director seeking to make nice; to be involved with a group where pretty much everyone you meet gives as much help and support as they can, absolutely without motive or agenda, is ridiculously rare, and I'm lucky to be part of it. As you pass through the theatre this month, there's a very good chance you will pass by someone who has been indispensably vital to this production, and you won't ever know.

I'm also very lucky with my cast, who have been full of verve and energy throughout, and been enormously patient even when rehearsing an incomplete script. It must have been frustrating, if viciously ironic, to be involved in a murder mystery where genuinely no-one knew who the killer was.

It's to them, and to all those involved with the production, however tangentially, and those who weren't even involved in any way but constantly offered their words of encouragement, and to those who I'm guaranteed to forget in any list of thanks, that I offer my unqualified (and I do mean unqualified; in every sense of the word) gratitude. For every thing that you enjoy about *Four Play* (and I promised myself I'd get through this whole thing without making a *Four Play/foreplay* gag), you can, like me, thank them. For anything where my *Four Play* disappoints (last time, I promise) you can blame me.

Andrew Allen

Acting Classes and Stage Management

Becoming an even more exquisite actor in four easy sessions - Mark Wilson

Mondays 6, 13, 20 and 27 June 7 pm

Over the four weeks Mark will work on the way actors can make use of both physical and vocal pace in order to enhance their work. Although the skills-content will build sequentially over the four weeks, this series of self-contained sessions will also lend itself to those preferring a drop-in approach. There will be opportunities to present work and to receive constructive feedback.

Stage Management/ Production Management Workshop

Saturday 25 June 2-6 pm

Would you like to learn about producing a show and all aspects involved backstage? Come and have a look behind the scenes and find out what is involved in getting a play from the script to stage. From 2-6pm we will be explaining the roles of Production and Stage manager, looking around the various areas of the theatre and sharing examples and experiences from previous shows.

For more information contact **ulrike.schilling@newventure.org.uk**

Just a reminder . . .

. . . that this Saturday 16 April at 7:30 we are having a social to announce the next season.

This is a great opportunity to find out which productions will be staged, enquire about them, talk to the directors and mention your interest in particular productions, as well as general networking and socialising. As part of the evening actors attending the 'working towards performance' workshop lead by Steven O'Shea will be performing prepared duologs and rehearsed readings of short scenes from a variety of plays. And of course our beloved bar will be open as usual, ensuring you will get the courage to volunteer for productions.

I am looking forward to seeing you there.

**Ulrike Schilling
Artistic Director**

NVT Box Office Options from Ian Black

As you will know, for the last few productions we have opened the Box Office for a few hours on certain days prior to the start of the production for sales of tickets.

The minimal use we have experienced has shown that this facility is not a useful way to utilise our volunteer resources, which are very meagre. Therefore for future productions and events the options for purchasing tickets will be as listed below.

- ◆ **Online** - you can purchase tickets online either through links on our website or by going to www.newventuretheatre.ticketsource.co.uk You will need a credit or debit card to use this option.
- ◆ **Post** - you can purchase tickets by post, using the flyer booking form or by clearly stating your ticket requirements in a letter. Cheque payment must accompany any postal booking. We will endeavour to confirm such bookings by post.

◆ **In Person** - You can book in person at the Box Office when it is open for another production or event. The Box Office opens at 7pm for evening performances and 2pm for matinees. Please try and avoid the last 10 minutes before the production starts. All forms of payment are possible here.

◆ **Phone** - If you are unable to book your tickets by any of the above methods a limited phone service will be made available. To use this you will need to leave a message on the Box Office phone line, stating your ticket needs and a call back number. Someone from the Box Office will call you back and make your booking. This will require credit or debit card payment.

Many thanks to all who give up their time to make tickets available both prior to the performances and in the weeks leading up. If you would like to help with Box Office please contact **boxoffice@newventure.org.uk** or ring 01273 808353. With the Fringe Festival fast approaching we really need your help.

Letters to the Editor

and the final word from members on the subject of Box Office arrangements - but also see Ian's discussion on the subject

Dear Editor

It was good of the Treasurer to take the time and trouble to respond to the comments from members about box office arrangements. There is still a bit of a gap, of course. Although Mr Donovan says that all answer-phone messages and queries are dealt with efficiently every day, the recorded message begins by stating clearly that this does not include bookings.

I hope he did not find my little moan insulting. I have been a strong supporter of New Venture for twenty years, during which time I have worked as a stage manager, asm, in the box office and front of house, as Little Theatre Guild representative, member of the newsletter stuffing group, and sporadic painting and cleaning. I say this not to claim any virtue - I've enjoyed all those activities - but to try to demonstrate that the theatre has my loyalty.

Yours sincerely

Janet Hewlett-Davies

Dear Editor

Congratulations ! It was wonderful to read that the new Box Office arrangements have been such a "huge sell-out success that tickets are selling faster and faster."

If we could pass on the secret to all the theatres in the world, nobody would ever have a flop on their hands again.

Well done, NVT !

George Osborne

‘The Well’

The Well, by local writer Jonathan Brown, weaves fact with fiction telling of the digging the 900 foot Woodingdean Well a task that took four years. It also relates Jack Tompkins’ search for the truth about his mother who died when he was a child – a search that uncovers corruption and lechery when he becomes obsessed with, Bella, a local prostitute.

The production, also directed by Brown, provided a powerful example of physical theatre with the cast called upon to play not only the characters but also the scenery and props. This they achieved with some spectacular imagery, aided by creative lighting. Amongst the many excellent images created, the flooding of the well and the subsequent drowning sequence were particularly stunning. The walls of the well, bedroom furniture and even a pub bar were created by the moulding of the actors’ bodies. All of this played on a bare stage in front an edifice made up of scaffolding and ladders that provided multi-level acting areas.

Accordingly the audience had a part to play by using its imagination and accepting the production style of more than one person playing the same character. This device needed to be tightened up at times to ensure an even transition. Any fraction of a second lapse broke the rhythm.

The hardworking cast, Ali McKenzie-Wilcox, Warren Saunders, Paddy O’Keefe, Julie Monckton, Mark Green, Leanne McKenzie and Jonathan Brown – invidious to single out any particular performances - demonstrated well the requirements of multi-role acting skills with the exhausting physical demands placed upon them. The production was enhanced by the acapella singers, Jo Mortimer, Christine Heaton and Ross Adamson, whose rendering of the folk style songs underlined and punctuated the action.

But there was a fault with the script and the production – it was far too long and verbose. Brown, in addition to writing,

directing also performed, was overstretched and failed to appreciate this. It needed a detached view to stop the pudding being over-egged. Often a good image was created and then its effectiveness weakened by too many words or repetitive action. For example the climb out of the flooded well – visually stunning- suffered by the over long litany of objects floating past. Likewise the action in the dream sequence of crawling out from under a landfall was repeated too many times – the scene lost its initial impact.

These reservations apart there was much to enjoy and be impressed with – particularly the actors and the quality of their performances.

A point for future consideration by Front of House- the lack of an announcement in the programme or in the studio regarding an interval caused some confusion. The actors walked off and the audience, thinking it was the end of the play as it could have been, waited for their return to take bows. After a fair time the penny dropped and people drifted out.

ARTS COUNCIL AWARD GRANT TO NVT



NVT are delighted to announce we have been awarded 50% funding towards upgrading our Studio Theatre.

We will be installing climate control, secondary glazing and new blackout blinds. This will greatly improve the comfort and ambience within the Studio for both audience, performers and production crew alike, making the space more attractive and welcoming for all.

'Fake' and 'Come Lie With Me'

This double bill of premiered plays shared the common theme of lying.

In *Fake* the audience are part of a live show at which celebrity TV medium, Steve Eldritch, relays messages from "beyond the veil". Before the performance, in an attempt to create the right atmosphere, the production team provided a novel touch. A trailer was shown in the bar area before the performance, featuring the medium in his dressing room preparing for the show and previous subjects providing testimonials of how they had been helped. Unfortunately at the matinee performance I attended, daylight made it impossible for a clear image to be seen. The trailer was rather long and the loss of clarity meant that the attention span waned and interest was lost.

Also before the performance I was approached by Michael Graney, who wrote the play, with the request not to reveal any of the surprises that may occur during the performance – like *The Mousetrap*, he did not want future audiences to be aware of any surprises. I am happy to go along with his request.

Suffice it to say that with appropriate fanfares and announcements Eldridge enters and with suitable warm up patter begins to select subjects/victims and provides them with "messages" A drama ensues that calls into question his validity – is Eldritch

genuine or fake? Hugh Stockdale delivered a spot-on portrayal of the smarmy Eldritch – all spray tan, sparkling teeth and squirming sincerity. As his "selected victims" Vincent Youngman gave a quiet understated performance of a recently widowed young man whilst Emily Gallichan's Eve was played very young and nervous – however the constant clutching and fiddling with her skirt soon became irritating. Phillipa Watt played Bright, a lady full of neurotic emotion – a strong performance that would have been bettered by bringing more light and shade into her delivery. Having started on such a high note she continued on one long plateau.

Lie With Me, devised by Steve Coulson, is homage to Mike Leigh and his improvisational style of working. A series of short scenes worked out with the cast revealed the overlapping lives of four characters and the lies that they tell in order to protect themselves or to live out their fantasies. Debbie shoplifts jewellery that she passes off as gifts from imaginary boyfriends; Darren is a middle aged man with low self esteem whose wife has left him; Sarah is in the midst of a crisis with her soon to be husband ending the relationship and Sian, a feisty youngster who resents her mother's constant nagging.

Succinct dialogue and sharp, seamless scene transitions soon captured the imagination and engendered a fascination as the

lives of each character impinged on the others. There were no weak performances. Anthony Dale, as Darren, began suitably downtrodden and became another person as his relationship with Sian developed. Emma Prendergast's Sarah was full of internal emotion as she could not accept that the wedding was not going to take place – a fact she could not bring herself to admit to her mother. Dan Walker gave a competent performance in the small role of her fiancée as did Christine Laurence, playing Sian's mother.

But it was the performances of Danielle White & Miranda Morris that stood out. White invested Sian with a certain charm despite her truculence and foul mouth. The bonding between her and Darren was intriguing to watch as each built confidence in the other.

Morris gave a remarkable performance as Debbie, one of the great unloved. Having met and, in her mind, claimed Darren as her own it was fascinating to watch her mood swings as she reacted to others intruding. She quietly brought out the desperation of a woman, living with her mother, desperately seeking love and someone "to lie with".

Congratulations to Ulrike Schilling for taking over the staging of this play when Coulson had to drop out for health reasons.

VACANCIES

We will be losing Ollie as our Treasurer and Mike as our Fundraiser. Both have indicated their intention to stand down at the AGM. These are crucial roles and we need to fill them.

Are you interested? Act now and shadow the role with Ollie or Mike. Ring - 01273 808353.

Our sponsors

Our sponsorship deal is £250 for a year's advertising on our website and in our brochure, newsletter and show programmes, plus 2 free tickets for each production in that year.

We need more sponsors, so please email mikestubbs2000@yahoo.co.uk if you have any ideas in that direction.



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