

NEW VENTURE

T H E A T R E

COMING SOON

**ELEPHANT'S GRAVEYARD by George Brant
directed by David Eaton | 14–22 June 2019**

HYSTERIA

by Terry Johnson | directed by Bob Ryder | 17–25 May 2019

Hysteria is a very rich play, very strong, and very strange. There's nothing quite like it – though it might remind you at times of Tom Stoppard's style, in masterpieces such as *Travesties*. Historical and hysterical at the same time. Serious issues and real events all wrapped up and served in a mad comedy of distortion, played back to us through tricks of memory.

The play made a strong mark at the Royal Court in 1993, reinforced by a revival in the West End three years later. I was bowled over by its sheer daring. We see Sigmund Freud, the celebrated but flawed psychoanalyst, mortally ill and tortured by doubt. It's 1938 and the world is going to hell in a handcart, Freud himself having just escaped to London from the growing Nazi onslaught against humanity in general and Jews in particular.

Yet the brilliant device that Terry Johnson used was to set this grim background of reality alongside two other real events - and very ridiculous events they were too. One was the visit paid to Freud in the summer of 1938 by the highly eccentric surrealist painter, Salvador Dali. The other odd event was a trip Freud had recently made to the Aldwych Theatre, to see the classic farce *Rookery Nook*. And in *Hysteria* these two things seem to be sparking Freud's imagination into a parallel world.

The result is a tide of comic action sweeping the play along, with 'real' reality dissolving into the powerful theatrical reality of farce. Classic ingredients galore – including psychological slapstick, a nude hidden in the closet and a mad artist losing his trousers. (Fans of *Rookery Nook* will have a field day spotting the parallels!) When the occasional 'reset'



Photographer: Strat Mastoris

occurs, the return to 'real' reality can be quite a shock.

I love this play because it does the kind of things that only theatre can. There is a very serious backbone to the narrative – life and death issues, intelligent insights into art and medical science, the cry of humanism and the gnawing of self-doubt. But at the same time it engages and embraces its audience with a generous mixture of pure fun and entertainment.

It takes a fine dramatist to pull off this kind of balancing act – and needless to say it presents big challenges to performers and members of the production team. We've been having a great time working on it!

Bob Ryder, Director

Review: PICKWICK AND WELLER

by Barry Purchase (& Charles Dickens) | music by Michael James
directed by Rod Lewis | review by Simon Jenner



Above, from left to right: Naomi Rose Horsfall, Adam Kincaid, Tom Slater-Hyndman, Thomas Hobart, Apollo Videaux and John Tolputt. Photograph by Strat Mastoris.

A New Venture premiere by twice BAFTA-winning Barry Purchase with a set by West End designer Tim McQuillan-Wright . . . Oh and a little help from Dickens. Purchase has filleted Dickens' 1000-page first novel from 1836, *The Pickwick Papers*, and condensed it to an elegant two hours fifteen in *Pickwick and Weller*.

That doesn't mean the cast-list boils down to two: far from it. The Studio space boasts nineteen actors, some multi-rolling, so very few – if any – of even second-tier characters are omitted (even if one becomes a scream offstage). John Tolputt and Nikolas Balfe lead the cast in their eponymous roles, notably supported by Culann Smyth's father of Sam, Tony Weller, Bertie Purchase's outrageous Alfred Jingle, Naomi Rose Horsfall's Mary, Sam's eventual fiancée.

The whole cast though thrill in exquisite character cameos, to consummate direction and blocking. At key openings and closes of scene they sing too. You think this might be turning out as a lost Dickens musical. It isn't but shows potential!

It's a delight, pacily directed by Rod Lewis. Set in the round McQuillan-Wright's set, built by a team including him and Simon Glazier, is simply a sawdust-suggestive centre a few chairs and the real set is the audience's seating. Set at vertiginously different tiers, a bit like a Donmar shrunk in the wash, with a ladder used at just one brief point (surely that could be amplified!). The set's neatly lit by Dan Walker (operated by Alex Apps), with rousing, memorable music by Michael James with sound operated by Cata Lindegard.

Richi Blennerhasset designs costumes – a sky-blue overcoat for Pickwick, stunning turquoise neckerchiefs for the club (slight blue clash there) and many exquisite details of dress, notably the teal overcoat and much else wrought for Alfred Jingle when passing himself off as a rich captain. Top hats and much black complete an absolutely in-period outfitting for everyone, whether sergeants and lawyers, womens' everyday or Sunday best (Mrs Bardell's scarlet skirt). To top it there's Julia Monkomb's hair and make-up, and Ian Black is the armourer. Alex Worrall's movement proves crucial in this tight space, and is seamless –



Left: Bertie Purchase and Thomas Hobart.

Below: Amanda Harman.

Overleaf; top: Gerry McCrudden, Bill Griffiths and Nikolas Balfe.

Overleaf; bottom: Martin Ryan and John Tolputt.

All photographs by Strat Mastoris.

particularly the exit through doors used with wit and élan, notably at the end. In all a sumptuous production.

The key narrative points of this picaresque and truly episodic novel – it was written in episodes as we’re reminded – are one decision with consequences. Samuel Pickwick inaugurates a Club with three friends (Tom Slater-Hydemann’s idiotic Nathaniel Winkle, Apollo Videux’ poet Augustus Snodgrass, Thomas Hobart’s elderly but wannabe swell Tracy Tupman).

They’re to travel Britain, usually together, and report on their findings. Amanda Harman’s Mrs Bardell (a widow and landlady to Pickwick) is clearly distressed at this until she realizes it’s not France they’re off to, and we’re alerted that her attachment to Pickwick is something he is oblivious of. Harman makes a neat job of someone perpetually having vapours, her eventual fainting-fit in court a tour-de-force.

There’s a scene with an unpleasant coachman, Jerry Lyne’s first menacing role (later Sergeant Buzzfuzz) a quintessence of snarling surliness, even violence. En route they stay at an inn, where the Wellers work, and Sam is taken on. But not before a scream from Bryony Weaver’s Miss Witherfield joins the fainting fit of Mrs Bardell (whom Pickwick gallantly catches), both key moments that drive disasters.

It’s here Purchase’s jarringly-spoken Alfred Jingle arrives, though only latterly are we given some of his choice phraseology, including adding the emphasiser ‘very’ after the main sentence. His command of swagger and nonchalance is counterpointed by his philosophical fall from grace, his fever-broken, starveling avatar in Newgate where as we know Pickwick

ends up too. He starts by getting Pickwick involved in a duel with Dr Slammer (realised with a quarrelsome scalpel’s edge by Martin Ryan) by wearing his blue coat.

Why does Bardell faint? Pickwick awkwardly expresses he’s engaging Weller as manservant, but in a way that two-for-one sounds vaguely like a marriage proposal to someone who’d construe it too keenly.

The counterplot swivels on wit, the curious Tony Weller, inveighing against marrying widows, and full of crackpot schemes including one for rescuing Pickwick in a hollow piano. Smyth relishes the off-kilter truculence and cheer for this, set against Balfe’s lithe and quick-witted (if occasionally wrong) Sam, investing him with a dignity and faithfulness almost beyond credibility. Balfe, whose quicksilver turns and expressive puzzlings-out can be read on his face, is as fine as Tolputt in the central role. Tolputt’s bemused dignity and streak of iron don’t preclude a flash of anger and intemperate lashings-out. Both actors seem exactly right for their parts.



Hyndman makes much use of his upper-class-twitness sniffing his nose and dropping Pickwick in it by sheer incompetence. Videux' Snodgrass has little room but as Justice Starleigh he can rip into caricature, whereas Hobart's Tupman is confined to being just a bit old. Adam Kinkaid's decent Mr Perker, who helps Sam spring Pickwick from where the lawyers have thrust him (you'll need to find out why) is given brief warmth.

Gerry McCrudden's blathering half-wit lawyer Fogg is a delight, cut across by the far more dangerous Dodson, played by Bill Griffiths with a vocally rasping clarity – just what's required here. He plays the duelling second Dr Payne as a canny intriguer too. Mark Lester is exceedingly nasty as the brutish sergeant Snubbins, Jeremy Crow as Magistrate Nupkins is allowed a streak of decency not to mention corruption, and Crow enjoys being able to change his notes to gratitude. Mark Green as Roker and Dubbley, and Sam de Costobadie's Jackson make neat impressions in small roles.

This is a swirl of virtuosity, a superbly realized romp with edge. To secure a world premiere with such a team is a tribute to NVT and everyone concerned in it. In a uniformly strong cast, Tolputt, Balfe, Smyth and Purchase have most to do and are most distinctive. But all the lesser roles are too. A triumph.



THE NVT ARCHIVE

As many will be aware over the past few years there has been a determined effort to record and collate the history of our theatre, its productions and all the talented people who have been the beating heart of the place since 1947.

We have made excellent progress- though more needs to be done. Various gaps need filling and old photographs identified. But we are in a good place to move to the next

stage. The plan is to add all our productions to the new Archive pages on our Website which Ian Black is designing. Alex Epps and I want to put together a small team who would be prepared to use their skills to input information on to the Archives page and to help scan in programmes and archive photos.

Gerry McCrudden
gerrymccrudden@hotmail.com

2019–2020 SEASON

The Social Evening and New Season Launch on Friday 26th of April was very well attended and enthusiastically received. After gathering convivially in the bar beforehand we all moved up to the Theatre Upstairs, practically filling it – the mood was lively and expectant! Working through the 2019–20 season chronologically, all ten of our directors for next season treated us to a brief intro to their plays and playwrights and a sort of taster of the personal visions they had of their productions.

In true NVT tradition, next season will prove once again to be a wide ranging, eclectic selection for us all to get involved with – yielding not only plenty of opportunities but also many a creative challenge! As always, the success of our productions totally depends on the goodwill, skills and talents, and sheer hard work that our wonderful volunteers generously bring to our projects – and long may it continue! 2019–20 – exciting theatre ahead!

Rod Lewis

4–12 October 2019

GABRIEL

by Moira Buffini
directed by Gerry McCrudden

1–9 November

FEN

by Caryl Churchill
directed by Ian Amos

6–14 December

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

by Dickens (adapted by Neil Bartlett)
directed by Diane Robinson

17–25 January 2020

WINTERLING

by Jez Butterworth
directed by Steven O'Shea

14–22 February

TALK

by Mark Wilson
directed by Mark Wilson

13–21 March

DEAD FUNNY

by Terry Johnson
directed by Richard Lindfield

17–25 April

THE HERD

by Rory Kennear
directed by Charly Sommers

15–23 May

CONSENT

by Nina Raine
directed by Scott Roberts

19–27 June

MISS JULIE

by August Strindberg
directed by Mark Lester

17–25 July

HANGMAN

by Martin McDonagh
directed by Pat Boxall

subject to rights availability

NVT ACTING CLASSES

Mondays 7:30 - 9:30 PM

(Please arrive in good time to begin promptly at 7:30 PM)

COST: £5 (NVT members £2.50)

In these drop in sessions you will be working with various teachers and cover acting techniques as well as theatre skills. We will be looking at audition techniques, working with text, movement, comedy and stage presence amongst other themes. The classes are mixed levels and open to anyone 18+, no previous experience needed. Attending the acting class is the best way to get involved with what we do and find out about auditions and productions. We

encourage all our members as well as those who want to get involved in the theatre in anyway to come along.

To find out more, come along to a class or to request more information about a particular block of sessions, have a look at our website at www.newventure.org.uk, where you can sign up to our mailing list, or email: actingclass@newventure.org.uk.

NVT NEWSLETTER

As part of a review of the NVT publicity processes we have been looking at the newsletter and its value to our members. Suggestions have included stopping the newsletter and expanding the brochure, changing its current format to an email version only. However, it isn't a simple decision as the newsletter may be the only direct contact some members have on a regular basis. Therefore, this article is intended to give you, our members, the details and ask you for suggestions.

Currently we have a newsletter that is produced as a pdf document, which is emailed to most members each month (except August & September). It appears that on average about 30% of members actually open the newsletter, we do not have any figures for how many read it. In addition to the pdf version we have 150 copies printed each month. These are only in black and white, so the colour images are not as strong. Of these printed copies 25 are posted

to members who do not have internet access. The rest are available in the theatre and a number are read / taken by audience members.

What are the options?

- We could continue as we are if there is a desire for the newsletter in its current format.
- Change to a production based email with the coming production details only.
- Move to an online newsletter, which would have to be printed for members without the internet.
- Expand the brochure to replace the newsletter for audience members.
- Something else completely - suggestions welcome
- A combination of some of the above

Please let us have your thoughts on the newsletter and how you would like to see it in the future.

OUR ANGELS

Why not become an angel, Fallen Angel, Archangel or even Archangel Gabriel to help us support our current and future improvements to our theatre. Our angels have proven to be generous in the assistance they give us. For further information please contact the Angel Coordinator Gerry McCrudden: angels@newventure.org.uk. If you are a UK tax payer your donation may also benefit from Gift Aid.

NVT MEMBERSHIP

At the last AGM our membership rate was formally changed to £15 a year, after a successful trial. To renew, or join if you are not yet a member, just go to our website: www.newventure.org.uk/joinus

IMPORTANT: YOU'LL SOON NEED YOUR MEMBERSHIP NUMBER TO BOOK TICKETS

In the next two or three months, a changeover will happen and booking ticket using your member's discount will require inputting your membership number and surname.

Picturehouse Cinemas, and it's less onerous than many organisations which require you to input a username and password.

We're coming alongside the likes of the Theatre Royal and

Queries? Email: boxoffice@newventure.co.uk

CONTACT US

Bedford Place, Brighton BN1 2PT
www.newventure.org.uk @nvt_brighton

General Enquiries 01273 808353 • info@newventure.org.uk
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Our sponsorship deal is £250 for a year's advertising on our website and in our brochure, newsletter and programmes, plus 2 complimentary tickets for each production in that year.



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We'd love to hear from you!

Please write in with any comments, articles or reviews of our productions and events to the Newsletter Editor - newsletter@newventure.org.uk or by post to the New Venture Theatre.