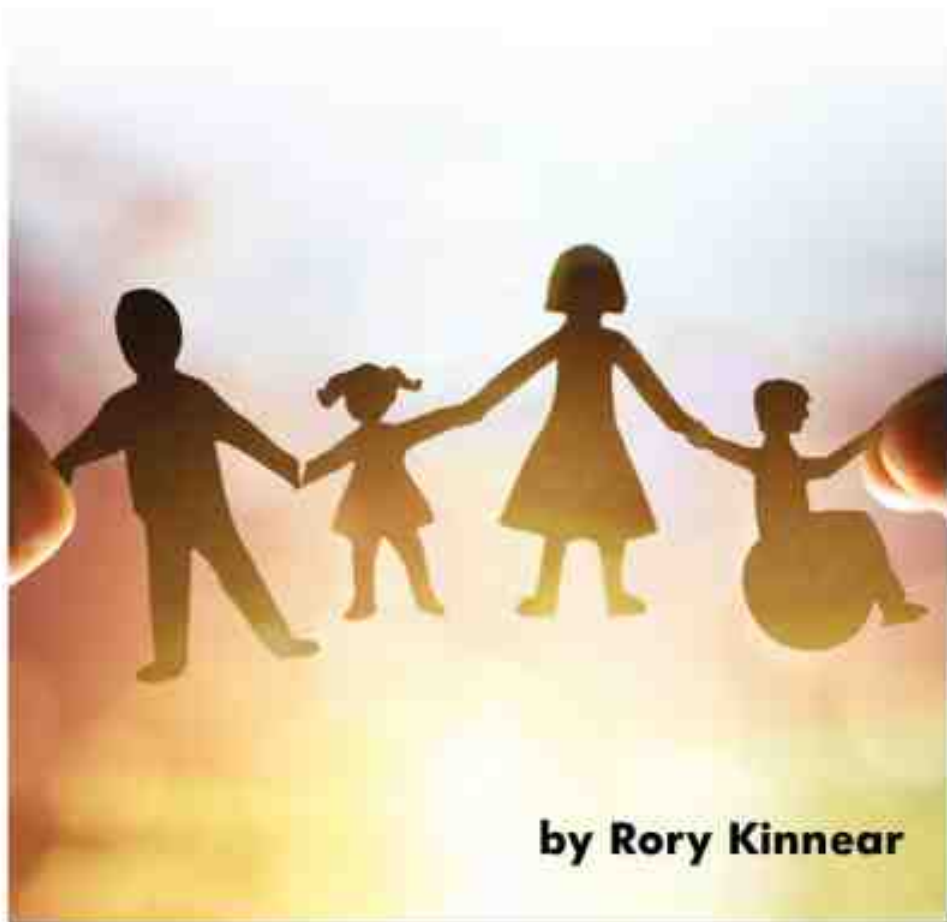


THE HERD

PULLING TOGETHER. FALLING APART.



by **Rory Kinnear**

NVT

**NEW
VENTURE
THEATRE**

Bedford Place
Brighton BN1 2PT

Friday 18th to Saturday 26th February 2022
at 7:45pm

Matinee: Sun 20th February at 2:30pm

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THE HERD

by Rory Kinnear

Who was it that said, "Family isn't only about blood – it's about sweat and tears, too."? It's the kind of quip you might dismiss if you see it on a greeting card. If you see it while reading Rory Kinnear's *The Herd*, though, it might make you pause...

I say that because *The Herd* is one of those plays that resonates with different people in different ways – and at different times. If I'd read this play ten years ago, I might not have 'got it'. Now I'm raising three kids, however – one of whom sees the world from a place on the autistic spectrum – I look for light in shade just as much as I check for monsters in shadows. Even so, it's hard to imagine what the family in *The Herd* has been through...

The play revolves around Andy: Andy has been intellectually and physically disabled since birth and has a mental age of ten months. As he turns 21, his mum – Carol – arranges a small gathering to celebrate. While the guest of honour is brought from his nursing home to the house, we meet the rest of the family that's pulled together and fallen apart around him.

The script of *The Herd* offers extraordinary contradictions: it's raw and it's warm; it's funny and it's brutal. On occasion, I've read a line while heading to rehearsal and thought little of it. Then I hear the actor say it and it completely changes how I feel. Just as in real life, words that harbour little meaning to one person can be hiding hope, horror or heartbreak for someone else. This is painfully true with *The Herd*'s sensitive subject matter...

The Herd is the second play I've directed at the NVT and, as with the first – the 2018 production of Dennis Kelly's *Orphans* – I'm extremely grateful to be collaborating with a universally brilliant cast and crew. Our initial attempts to stage *The Herd*, back at the start of 2020, were completely derailed by the first lockdown... So it's both a pleasure and a relief to finally share this remarkable play with you.



Charly Sommers

After making her directorial debut with *Orphans* in 2018, Charly Sommers read a number of scripts – with surprising indifference. "When I read *The Herd*, though..." says Charly, "...I immediately wanted to do it. It sizzles on the page, and offers serious challenges, both on and off stage."

Charly's theatrical experience includes roles in *Comment is Free* and *King Charles III*. She was production manager for *Antigone*, and wrote a comic piece, *The Swing* for the NVT's short-play festival.

CAROL	Katie Brownings
CLAIRE	Grace Vance
PATRICIA	Nikki Dunsford
BRIAN	John Tolputt
MARK	Lewis Todhunter
IAN	Rob Punter
ANDY	Joseph Tipler

DIRECTOR: Charly Sommers • PRODUCTION MANAGER: James Maltby • STAGE MANAGER: Erin Burbridge • ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS: Carol Croft, Martyn Coates • CREATIVE CONSULTANT: Deej Johnson • PHOTOGRAPHY: James Maltby, Strat Mastoris • DESIGNER: Tim McQuillen-Wright • SET TEAM: Simon Glazier, George Walter, Rob Punter, Katie Brownings, Steve Coulson, John Everett • LIGHTING DESIGNER: Strat Mastoris • LIGHTING OPERATORS: Tamsin Mastoris, Esme Bird • SOUND DESIGN/OPERATOR: James Maltby • POSTER DESIGN: James Maltby • PROPS: Erin Burbridge, Katie Brownings, James Maltby • COSTUME: Charly Sommers, the Cast • HEALTH & SAFETY: Ian Black • PROGRAMME: Ian Amos • LIVE STREAM: Apollo Videaux

Heartfelt thanks go to Ben Gladstone, Katie Brownings, Marian, Neil and Joseph Tipler, Justin Sainsbury, Mike Stubbs, Lucy Hughes, Jules & Guy Cope, Jeremy Crow, Beverley Grover, Neil Hadley, Claire Lewis, Alex McQuillen-Wright, Anna Reed, Liane Sommers, Sue Sommers, Alan Stewart, Harriet Wakefield, Amaze, Extratime, PaCC, Front of House, Box Office, the crew, all NVT volunteers... And finally the actors, for their commitment, hard work and bravery.

This production of *The Herd* supports the charity Extratime. Extratime helps provide quality activities for those aged 5-18. It also develops safe, fun environments focusing on what can be done for children with disabilities, rather than what can't.

There are Extratime donation boxes in the bar. We won't hound you, but please give whatever you can. It's a local charity, and every penny helps. Thank you.

An amateur production by arrangement with Nick Hern Books

Marian Tipler discusses *The Herd*...And how her family copes with complex disability.

Marian, you kindly agreed to consult on staging *The Herd* and have your son, Joseph, portray Andy. What's Joseph's condition; what challenges does he face?

Joseph has a range of complex needs, caused by a rare genetic condition; KCNH1 Disorder. He can't speak and has a limited understanding of words, but finds his own way to communicate. He can't walk far – but can make an impressive sprint when you least expect it. His coordination is poor but he has a strong grip when he spots people who interest him.

In that respect, how much of the world does Joseph understand?

It's not always clear! To people who don't know him, he probably seems like someone who can't do very much at all... A young man in a wheelchair who grabs strangers who get too close and understands nothing. But he's actually much more than that. He often, and quite suddenly, does something amazing which is quite mystifying. He gives the best hugs – generally when he's trying to distract you from something he doesn't want to do. He's severely visually impaired but loves looking at plants and trees very closely.

And what kind of challenges do you face as a parent?

They're complex. You have to get used to having LOTS of people in in your life: therapists, social services, charities, schools, medical people... They all do assessments of particular aspects of your child, but rarely seem to see the whole child. You have to coordinate them and all the appointments – work out which battles to fight, and which things to let slide. Then there are issues of getting access to places; getting the right care; people staring when Joseph shouts; children asking their parents questions and being shushed as we go by... We also wonder who'll look after Joseph when we're too old to care for him, and fear what would happen if he has to go into hospital. I constantly question myself as to whether we're doing the best for him. But Joseph's main concerns are probably getting enough people to rub his head, take him for walks and let him sit on their lap.

Is any area of your life not affected? And in what ways do you cope?

No; I think it affects every aspect – relationships with family, friends, your partner; it affects your career, social life and your own health – mental and physical. It also affects how you feel about society and how you relate to your community. In terms of coping, I try not to be too insular; I try to keep in touch with people outside the world of disability. That's not easy – I like my special-needs friends; we 'get' each other. It can be exhausting explaining things to other people. When I meet new people, and start explaining about Joseph, it's really hard to summarise his needs and our lives. It feels weird that some people actually know nothing about life with a complex disability when everyone we know knows so much.

Is it weird to talk about it now?!

A little bit, yes. I'm not generally very reflective – we just carry on with our lives, and deal with things as they come along. My Facebook memories at the moment, for example, remind me of when Joseph was in hospital with pneumonia five years ago. He was ventilated for nearly two

weeks, and in hospital for about a month... Such a scary time. But we got through it. Looking at the pictures now, it's hard to believe it happened to us. People say things like, "special children go to special parents" and other such rubbish... We're all just trying to do our best, like all parents. It's just a really different experience of parenting.

How important is it, then, to raise awareness?

That's a hard question. It can feel overwhelming to start taking on the pain and difficulty of other people's lives. But of course awareness is important – even if it's just cafes leaving enough space for a wheelchair between tables. Without awareness, services continue to be underfunded, and people with disabilities continue to feel isolated and vulnerable. And wider society misses out on all the amazing joy and creativity and wonder that people with disabilities could be sharing. Go for a walk with Joseph and you get to look at hedges in great detail; you start to understand that a shadow on the pavement really could be a step you need to be careful of, you could really enjoy a lovely piece of cake.

And in your experience, what would help raise that awareness?

It probably starts with more genuinely inclusive education and play, leisure and social activities for children. It also needs a shift in how society values individuals – rather than just measuring our worth by how economically active we are. On an everyday level, it'd be good if people could move away from the "it's rude to stare" mentality towards "smile and say hello" when they see someone who seems different. Let children ask questions about disability – and try to answer them honestly. If you don't know the answer, tell them you'll try to find out why a big boy might be in a wheelchair, stamping his feet, chewing his toys. Oh, and I hate it when children say, "Why's that man got baby toys?" – Toys are just toys; they're for whoever wants to play with them.

You'll get no argument from me there! As I recall, you read *The Herd* some time ago. What do you think the play gets right? And what does it not do so well for you?

I found it deeply affecting. It certainly captures the way in which caring for a severely disabled child affects every aspect of your life and ripples out to the wider family. I didn't find the joy and fun that we enjoy together reflected in the play – the laughs we have with friends, and the support we give each other. But our family situation is quite different to that of the family in the play, as Joseph is nowhere near as medically complex as Andy.

Marian, we need to wrap this up but I want to thank you for making time for the NVT. I'd also like to thank you for speaking with us; it's been incredibly insightful. One final question... When asked, you suggested we raise funds for *Extratime*. Tell us about that...

Not at all; thank you! I hope I didn't ramble! *Extratime* offers children and young people with additional needs the opportunity to play and have fun in inclusive, positive settings – where they're valued for what they can do, not judged by what they can't do. For Joseph, the *Extratime* after-school club, holiday playscheme and youth activities were the only place he got to spend time with a mix of children, away from us. It also meant that I could go to work, knowing that Joseph was safe and happy, trying new things and having fun. Inclusive leisure activities aren't easy to find, and make a huge difference to children and families. We set it up because there was nothing else like it here – and there still isn't.



Katie Brownings

The Finnish word *sisu* – pronounced “See-Sue” – lacks an exact English translation. Roughly speaking, though, it’s a near-preternatural sense of determination. Along with her love of family, it’s this ‘sisu’ that defines the character Carol.

With 40 years of acting under her belt, Katie has lost count of her appearances at the *NVT*. This is her second role here following an eight-year break from the stage; the first was as Matron in *Be My Baby*.

Grace Vance

Asked what she likes about her character, Claire, Grace nominates her quick, cold wit. Grace also admires the fact that Claire stands up for herself – despite the difficulties it can cause.

This is Grace’s first production with the *NVT*. But it’s hard to imagine it being her last! Her previous credits include *The Sound of Music* at the *London Palladium*, and *Ashes to Ashes* for the *BBC*.



Nikki Dunsford

Who was it that said, “Women are the true architects of the world”? It’s hard to argue with that as you watch Nikki Dunsford play a fiercely protective matriarch, Patricia. Waspish, fiery and fantastic, Patricia is at the heart of the family that’s pulling together but falling apart.

John Tolputt

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Oscar Wilde suggests, “The tragedy of old age is not that one is old, but that one is young...”. John Tolputt sees the truth of this in his character, Brian. Held back by the age of his body, but pushed on by the youth of his spirit, Brian brings proportion, humour and loyalty to *The Herz*.

John Tolputt is a respected and much-sought actor. His previous work includes memorable roles in *King Charles III*, *No Man’s Land*, *The Arsonists* and *Pickwick*.



Lewis Todhunter

Lewis Todhunter is making his *NVT* debut playing Mark. As the only character that’s not a member of the family, Mark is arguably the least affected of the players. He’s creative and laid back, and hugely supportive of those he loves... Even in trying times.

Noting he has little theatrical experience, Lewis says this play has been eye opening. He adds that working with the cast has given him more confidence in expressing his opinions. We’re delighted to welcome him to the *NVT*.



Rob Punter

As an absentee father, the character Ian has been inside the family looking out... And is now outside looking in. In his *NVT* debut, actor Rob Punter imbues Ian with quiet determination - and a troubled conscience.

Rob's acting roles include musical parts in *Oliver*, *The Producers* and *Hello Dolly*. He has also appeared in the plays *The River* and *Animal Farm*. Offstage, Rob's theatre work includes prop making and set design/construction for *Steam*. His contribution to *The Herd* set has been enormous.

Joseph Tipler

Determined. Cheeky. Happy. These are the three words Marian Tipler uses to describe her son, Joseph. In this production, Joseph portrays the character Andy.

Now 23, Joseph was diagnosed with the condition KCNHI at the age of 18. KCNHI leaves Joseph with not only physical disabilities, but also complex sensory and learning impairments. We're privileged to have Marian and Joseph working on *The Herd*.



Booking NOW



at newventure.org.uk



MEASURE 2 MEASURE & UNSANCTIONED

written/adapted by Sam Chittenden
Fri 18th to Sat 26th March

This unusual double-bill pairs a brand-new dystopian drama with an exciting reworking of Shakespeare's difficult 'comedy', to explore sexual politics in two radically different places and times.

UNSANCTIONED is set in a world ravaged by climate change, in which all pregnancies and births must be state-sanctioned. It is an intimately scaled and female-centric tale of infiltration and betrayal.

MEASURE 2 MEASURE is a stripped down, one-act adaptation of Shakespeare's play. This version focuses on the #MeToo-like theme at the heart of the play, without any pantomime or get-out clauses.

Together, the two plays explore themes that are hugely relevant today, including climate change and the abuse of power – both personal and political. The production includes adult themes and some strong language.



Supporting NVT

Founded in 1947, we are a membership club performing both established plays (classical and contemporary) and showcasing new writing. If you are interested in joining us please pick up a membership form in the foyer or visit www.newventure.org.uk.

In 1983 NVT bought the freehold of its wonderful listed Victorian building. Recently we have embarked on a 5-year plan 'Renewal at New Venture' to carry out some important

renovations and improvements – details on our website. To meet this expense we need to raise £80,000 between 2021 and 2025 and would greatly appreciate your support! Please donate what you can by:

- * Visiting www.newventure.org.uk and follow 'Renewal at New Venture' link
- * Using collection boxes and Gift Aid envelopes in the theatre
- * Emailing fundraising@newventure.org.uk

Please also look out for details of our Social/Fundraising events planned for April, July and September - more details on the website as each event draws near.



Contacting the NVT

For ticket information only, call the Box Office - 01273 746118. To book tickets or for other information check our website at www.newventure.org.uk. All other enquiries 01273 808353

NVYT - Youth Theatre

NVT welcomes all young people (12-17) with a passion for or an interest in theatre. Fridays 4.30-6.30pm. £50 per 10 week term, first session is FREE!

NVT Acting Class

Classes will resume shortly - please see website for details. It will cost you just £5 per session (£2 for NVT members) First visit is FREE!

Become a Sponsor

£250: Advertise on the website, in each programme and our newsletter for one year. Plus two free tickets per show. Contact fundraising@newventure.org.uk for details.

Or why not become an Angel, Archangel or even Archangel Gabriel to help us support the current and future improvements to our theatre. For further information please contact the Angels Coordinator Gerry McCudden: angels@newventure.org.uk.

Membership

Company membership - £15 a year. Full participation, discount on tickets & newsletter. Student/Unwaged - £10 a year. As above... Proof of status is required.

“Those who have a ‘why’ to live, can bear with almost any ‘how’.”

Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*