

STATE OF THE PLAY

Spring 2006

Playmarket's Newsletter for Independent Theatre Groups

Spring may not feel as though it is here yet, but the Spring edition of *State of the Play* most certainly is. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. I am Michael Daly, the new administrator here at Playmarket. If you have any questions, need to source a script or require a script performance licence please feel free to contact me at info@playmarket.org.nz and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Inside this edition we talk with April Phillips about her craft as a playwright and the play *STiFF*. We also get an insight into the newly formed *Theatre Whakatane* by hearing from committee member Gwenda Ruegg about what the merging of the two local theatre organisations has meant to the community. There are also some reminders of the classic Kiwi plays and more frequently licensed plays amongst independent theatre groups. **Michael Daly.**

Ugly Customers by Joe Musaphia

(3 female, 3 male)

An elderly couple hold up a bank and demand money (no gold coins thank you). The bank manager and bank tellers are given lessons and a refresher course on customer service and manners. As the armed defenders squad surrounds the bank, the elderly couple spring into action.

Jones & Jones by Vincent O'Sullivan

Published by VUP (3 female, 3 male)

This play focuses on the relationship between Katherine Mansfield and Ida Baker and their private alter egos as Jones & Jones, cabaret artistes.

The Paradise Package by Geraldine Brophy

(3 female, 3 male)

Three couples, two bures and a tropical island resort specialising in wedding packages...

Richard and Louise are married with a 30 year age difference in an open relationship that's not as straight forward as it seems.

They are here for a vow renewal ceremony...

The Wedding of Joy Package. Simon and Hugh's 17 year relationship is about to take them down the aisle in true romantic style despite certain disabilities and an unknown ex-wife. They are committing to a Celestial Union Package.

Stretchmarks by Sarah Delahunty with music by Michelle Scullion

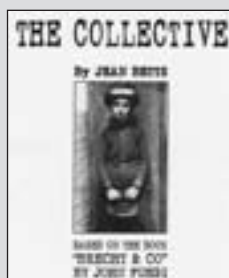
(4 female)

Romance, marriage and motherhood viewed through the eyes of different women, a mixture of satire and true feelings.

The Verdict by Bruce Mason

(3 female, 4 male)

Two couples discuss a court case in the paper only



The Collective by Jean Betts

(6 female, 3 male)

Based on John Fuegi's book *Brecht & Co* and the first NZ finalist for the prestigious international Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, *The Collective* is a witty, boisterous and intelligent dramatisation of the story of Bertolt Brecht's theatre collective. The play illustrates Fuegi's challenge that it is now indisputable that much of Bertolt's work was written by other writers - members of his collective (mostly women).

to be confronted by one of the key players. A look at the politics of judging and being judged.

A Shaggy Dog Story by David Geary

(2 female, 4 male)

Shaggy sheepdog Blue leads his all-dogstar troupe in telling the tall twisted tale of a farmer who wears armour to find true love. And, for his own part, Blue finds life's a Labradoodle bitch.

Motormouth by Bevin Linkhorn

(3 female, 2 male)

Resting up in retirement homes, bowling, housie, knitting? But are they? Really? In *Motormouth*, a fast-talking, car crazy 8-year old girl finds otherwise when she stumbles into the surprising

world of grandparents in a quirky children's drama about the value of grandparents.

The Curative by Tony McCaffrey

(1 female, 4 male)

William Lonsdale is chained to the wall of a filthy room in the "incurables wing" in London's infamous Bedlam at the turn of the 19th century. He doesn't know how he got there or if he will ever get out. He tells his life story to his wretch of a cellmate, reflects on the ephemeral nature of happiness and diverts himself with word games.

The Sexiest Man in the World by Joseph Musaphia

(3 female, 3 male)

A Kiwi-born action movie superstar voted 'The Sexiest Man In the World' wants to make a 'serious' movie about Te Rauparaha. He has to contend with Maori activists, his widowed Kiwi mum, the cut throat Hollywood system, and his monumental ego - 'I am a living legend!'

The Rising Scone by Mel Johnston

(3 female, 1 male)

Four young people mount a scone race in an effort to put their small town on the map. The race is on, but the battle for places is soon overshadowed by something... er... bigger.

ARE YOU GROUPIES?

A great way for theatre companies to support the future of NZ theatre is by becoming members of Playmarket. In return, you will receive a free annual subscription to the Playmarket News, a 10% discount off all script orders, a regular ebulletin and our love. See the subscription form on the back inside cover of the magazine.

PROFILE: APRIL PHILLIPS



PHILLIPS TALKS OPENLY ABOUT HER *STIFF*

STIFF by April Phillips

(4 female, 3 male)

Angel Delight, the illegitimate daughter of a funeral parlour director, inherits the business when her father dies. Before she can sell the business and the land (which is much more valuable) she has to continue to run the business as a funeral parlour for a further five years. Unfortunately she knows nothing about the funeral business but a lot about prostitution.

Angel and her team of 'girls' (including an obsessive compulsive transvestite named Delilah) run an undercover massage parlour in the funeral home keeping up appearances despite the prying of disgruntled former employee Mr R. Swipe who felt he should have inherited the business. Suspenders, death by misadventure and unorthodox embalming techniques feature in this hilarious, quickfire comedy. Rude not crude, cheeky not vulgar – it's a modern farce with lots of great characters.

One of Playmarket's more licensed plays recently is *STIFF* by April Phillips. We asked April a few questions about the play and being a playwright in New Zealand.

What has drawn you to playwriting, and how do you sustain your passion?

When I was at drama school our tutors encouraged us to write our own material to produce and perform in because there is so little regular acting work. So to be honest, I didn't start writing because I had any ambitions to be a playwright. I started writing plays with good characters and juicy plots for me and my actor friends to bring to the stage.

My first experience was writing my own sketches for performance with Hen's Teeth. This was great for honing my comedy skills. I love writing comedy because the audience feedback when it works is extremely rewarding. There's nothing like making people laugh. My acting career started out with bedroom farces – fast-paced situation comedies and my writing has been directly influenced by these.

STIFF has a ridiculous situation and crazy characters. From go to wo it's gags and one-liners flying left right and centre and lots of "business" all designed to keep the audience laughing for the entire play. I get ideas for stories and plays all the time too many to do anything with. *Killing Me Softly* was written at the time Michael Laws

was trying to get euthanasia legislation through Parliament. He wasn't successful, but it's still a hot topic. I think being an actor has a big influence on my desire to write. I often write about controversial or emotional topics because they create challenging acting roles.

***STIFF* has been produced by eight different companies; what do you think makes this script an attractive option?**

Going by the feedback I have received from those who have produced the show, *STIFF* really succeeds in making people laugh. How often do you go to a movie billed as a comedy and it only makes you smile. *STIFF* creates belly laughs. There is so much to be sad or concerned about in the world today and *STIFF* is a couple of hours of silliness and hilarity. It's a cliché, but laughter is the best medicine. I am really chuffed that something I have created makes people laugh and feel good.

What do you believe we should be seeing on New Zealand stages and why?

I think there is wonderful, exciting and innovative material being written and produced in New Zealand. The difficult aspect has always been getting it funded and produced. If only the arts were as well supported as sports in this country.

My plays tend to be non-specific in location and sometimes it does seem that plays need to be obviously set in New Zealand with references to Kiwi culture to get produced. I think theatre practitioners and audiences are now sophisticated and confident enough to have more exposure to wider topics and stories that are not so specifically "Kiwi" yet can still be related to by New Zealanders. It has been important for a long

time that New Zealand stories are told, but now I think we've reached a point where, if the story is a good one and worth telling, then the location doesn't matter so much.

What is next for you, and what should we be keeping an eye out from you in the near future?

So many ideas and projects. My latest piece, a one act called *Instinct* is quite heavy and provocative. So maybe it's time to lighten up with another comedy or a musical. I've been working on some original songs for a second album, so maybe a full-length musical is next. Watch this space!

ALSO BY APRIL PHILLIPS:

***Killing Me Softly* by April Phillips**

(3 female)

Three friends in their 20's meet regularly to reminisce about school times and their lives since. They play Truth or Dare. One friend has terminal cancer and asks (dares) the others to kill her.

***Blue Eyes* by April Phillips**

(2 female, 2 male)

Described as a 'Cabaret with Story' this weaves together the music of Frank Sinatra (band required) with a NZ story. Going through her late mother's personal effects, Frances discovers old letters from her mother to Sinatra, and for the first time realises her mother was a singer in the 1960s.

(Contact APRA to organise music license).

PROFILE: THEATRE WHAKATANE

Gwenda Ruegg is a committee member for the newly formed Theatre Whakatane.

Theatre Whakatane is forging ahead with a new charter of commitment to both drama and musical theatre. We look forward to seeing the new body of work from this organisation as it learns from the past and moves into new territory.

RIGHT: Theatre Whakatane's production of April Phillips' *STIFF*.



Whakatane Musical Theatre and Whakatane Repertory amalgamated over the last six months to form Theatre Whakatane Inc. With the combined resources of personnel, technical equipment and expertise and if the first production from the new group was any indication, it promises for good times in theatre ahead for Whakatane. Musicals have always been extremely successful and Repertory plays were not so well received, so the amalgamation and new beginning with a dramatic production would test the interest.

The first non-musical production *STIFF*, the adult comedy by Wellington playwright April Phillips, has set a benchmark for the new committee. With a simple set and amazing script this show was a sell out success. The Eastern Bay of Plenty embraced this comedy and many new faces were drawn to theatre and have continued to come. The reaction from the Community has shown that you don't have to leave town to be entertained. The members of Theatre Whakatane themselves were absolutely buzzing at the response and looking forward to more plays to be involved in.

Using a catchy logo, financial budgeting formulas for advertising, sound, quality programme, costumes etc, that musicals have enjoyed through the years, this production of *STIFF* saw more patrons attend the first two performances than have attended a local drama in many years. How exciting it was to put the SOLD OUT sign up days before closing night!! The financial return was also a boost to the new Theatre Whakatane building fund. The commitment of the new Theatre Whakatane Committee is to produce both drama and musical productions each year to maintain the standard set with *STIFF* and the response from the Community is that they want more.

NEW ZEALAND TEXTS PREVIOUSLY PRODUCED BY WHAKATANE MUSICAL THEATRE AND WHAKATANE REPERTORY

Nga Tangata Toa (The Warrior People)

by **Hone Kouka**

(3 female, 4 male)

East Coast 1919. From all parts of the country whanau travel to their marae at Onehura to celebrate the return of a war hero, their warrior brother Taneatua. But the shifting sands yield secrets – guilt, family honour and unfulfilled longings. Based on *The Vikings* by Henrik Ibsen.

Downstage Theatre will produce this text in October 2006.

Osbert The Huge Meets Mrs Perendalis

by **Alan Williamson** with songs by **Andrew Thomas** and **Betty Shepherd**

(6 female, 7 male)

Osbert is a hippopotamus; Mrs Perendalis is an explorer. With music by Andrew Thomas.

Badjelly The Witch by **Alannah O'Sullivan**

from the book by **Spike Milligan**

(4 female, 4 male)

A lively adaptation of Spike Milligan's popular children's story. Tim and Rose go off in search of their cow Lucy who has been stolen by the wicked Badjelly and her giant servant Dulboot. On the way they meet many characters including Binklebonk, the tree goblin, Silly Sausage, a barking grasshopper, Mudwiggie the super strong worm and the very polite Dinglemouse who was once a banana!

Love Off The Shelf by **R. Hall** (Book), **A.K. Grant** (Lyrics) and **P. Norman** (Music)
(4 female, 4 male)

Two unsuccessful authors turn secretly to romance writing. Their characters loom up to act out one plot after another, giving good advice along the way. The play ends very satisfyingly for the romance writers.

Serial Killers by **James Griffin**

(4 female, 3 male)

The storyliners and writers of popular soap opera, *Heart of Hearts*, find themselves in a desperate situation when one of their characters starts creating his own plot twists. The writers of the TV hospital soap *Heart of Hearts* are under pressure from falling ratings and vent their frustration by 'killing off' a bad actor. But this is only the beginning...

The Learner's Stand by **David Geary**

(2 female, 4 male)

Romance and intrigue develop in the oddball shearing gang of Pete, Terry and transsexual Dawn, under the watchful eyes of a couple of talking sheep. Human and sheep versions available.

Need to purchase
a NZ script?

or need to obtain
a script licence?

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WHO'S WHO?

In the interest of clarifying where to direct your enquiries, here's a brief summary of Playmarket's services, and those of three other organisations whose services we receive frequent enquiries about.

PLAYMARKET

Is the agent for New Zealand playwrights and handles the performance rights to their scripts. We also offer a bookshop / script order service, through which you can buy any script which we represent (published or unpublished). The best way to search for a script which we hold, or to generally explore this wealth of New Zealand plays, is to consult our website: www.playmarket.org.nz

FINDING A SCRIPT:

Go to the 'Order a Script' page, and you can either search by author name or choose 'search' and select various ways to limit your search, such as style, cast size, length and so on. Once you've decided which plays you would like to read, you can either order a copy directly through the website, or hire a perusal script from the NZ Theatre Federation.

APPLYING FOR A PERFORMANCE LICENCE:

Go to the 'Producing a Play' page on the website and fill in the online form or contact Katrina at Playmarket.

Contracts are sent out, a non-refundable advance fee is paid (held against 10% of the total box office takings), and then rehearsals for the production can go ahead. Afterwards, any remainder of 10% of takings is paid to Playmarket, and we can then pay the playwrights their well-earned royalties.

If you're passing by our street address, Level 2, 16 Cambridge Terrace, Wellington, come up and have a look through our bookshop. We stock copies of all published New Zealand plays.

Playmarket also operates the National Script Development Service, which funds a wide range of script development. These include a script assessment service (offering detailed professional assessment of your script by a professional script advisor, for \$100).

THE NEW ZEALAND THEATRE FEDERATION

The New Zealand Theatre Federation is a hiring library for scripts. They also run an annual one-act play festival. Contact Jannat Aitchison to hire perusal copies of any of the scripts found on the Playmarket website, and to hire production sets of scripts. Open 10-3pm Monday to Thursday.

PLAY BUREAU

Operates a theatre library hire service for perusal and production sets of plays and musicals from most overseas countries (they are also booksellers). Playbureau is your first port of call if you want to find out about the performance rights to a non-New Zealand play. The range of script sets they stock covers primary school to operatic society level. They are the sole New Zealand representatives for some of the largest publishers in the world; if they don't act as agents for an overseas script then you need to approach the author's overseas agent directly (contact details are usually below the publishing details of a play).

AUSTRALASIAN PERFORMING RIGHTS ASSOCIATION

APRA licenses the public performance of music on behalf of music writers. It represents thousands of composers and their works, from Stravinsky to Neil Finn. If you want to perform an international musical, or have live or recorded music within a production, you must contact APRA for the rights. It is best to apply for performance rights to music for your production at least six weeks before you need to start using music in rehearsals, preferably longer, as some tracks can take a long time (and international negotiations) to clear, or may not be available.

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Playbureau

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