

SCHOOLS UPDATE

Spring 2006

Playmarket's Resource for Teachers Keeping Schools 'Up With the Play'

Hi teachers and welcome to the super spring edition of *Schools Update*. I'm Michael Daly the new administrator here at Playmarket. If you have any questions regarding the purchasing or licensing of a New Zealand play contact me on (04) 382 8462 or info@playmarket.org.nz.

"ONE-ACT ONE-DERS" First up in this edition we have provided a selection of solo pieces. I had the chance to ask Aranui High School about their recent student production of *Ophelia Thinks Harder*. We have also included an article by playwright Kevin Boon as he reflects on how important it is for writers to see their own work performed, which is interesting for those student devised pieces that are about to see an audience. **Michael Daly.**

Mr Punch by **Roger Hall** adapted from the writing of **Denis Glover**

(1 male)

This dramatic life of Denis Glover was devised and compiled by Roger Hall from Glover's writings, letters and poems.

It's Alive by **Ken Hudson**

(1 female)

Entertaining monologue of a pregnant woman whose baby progresses from tadpole size to the point of birth where she, glad she's not married, wonders whether to ring Royce, Lionel, Simon... or get on with it.

Mauri Tu by **Hone Kouka** Aoraki Press, 1992

(1 male)

Inspired by a newspaper article about a young Maori asking to be tried on the Marae, Mauri Tu tells the story of Tero, a man alienated from both Maori and Pakeha culture exploding into violence.

Invisible Ink by **Brian McNeill**

(1 female)

A one-woman show with songs by John Drummond. The play examines the life of the Dutch courtesan and World War One spy Mata Hari.

Tommy Swain by **John Vakidis**

(1 male)

A monologue about a man and his addictions.

Twelve by **Duncan Sarkies**

(1 male)

A monologue (one of three that makes up *Blue Vein & Other Twisted Tales*) by a twelve year old boy in which he examines his life so far and his relationship with family and friends.

Banging Cymbal, Clanging Gong by

Jo Randerson

(1 female)

The Barbarian tells it like it is, her comments on



CLOSING SOON: NZYPC 2006 – the ninth New Zealand Young Playwrights Competition.

Six students win a week in Auckland at THE EDGE to workshop their play with professionals.

Lesson plans and a local playwright are available to help you inspire your students.

- Deadline – 5pm, **Friday 8th December.**
- Open to New Zealand residents between the ages of 16 and 24 at the deadline date.
- Enter up to three plays.
- Write about anything.
- Minimum 30 minutes.
- (1 page of script = 1 minute)

Brochures and registration forms available through Playmarket. For further info please email scripts@playmarket.org.nz or phone **(04) 382 8462.**



social and cultural attitudes are shocking and blunt as well as delicate and romantic.

Ka Shue - Letters Home by **Lynda Chanwai Earle**

The Women's Play Press, 1998

(1 female)

The different attitudes and concerns of Chinese-New Zealand women are vividly portrayed across two continents and three generations.

Fact or Fiction: Meditations on Mary Finger

by **Vivienne Plumb** in **Red Light Means Stop**

The Women's Play Press, Wellington 2003

(1 female)

Veevee Palumbo, celebrated Australia art critic, is in New Zealand to study and lecture on the little known (and now deceased) artist, Mary Finger. In feisty dialogue and with archival footage on video.

I'm Having It Off With Ajax by **Mel Johnston**

in **Red Light Means Stop**

The Women's Play Press, Wellington 2003

(1 female)

A woman becomes obsessed with cleaning, to the detriment of her relationship: "I had been missing out on something, but had to wonder, if by cleaning up one mess, I hadn't created another."

The Packer by **Dianna Fuemana**

(1 male)

The Packer is told from the point-of-view of Shane, a young Westie who works all night... packing boxes. We meet him at work but he soon introduces us to Joyce, his alcoholic mother; Brad, his best mate and...Pina.

Talent by **Gabe McDonnell**

(1 female)

A very funny observation of Mall life and Christmas consumer overload, uncovering the lives of three very different women on Christmas Eve in a suburb near you.

Nga Pou Wahine by **Briar Grace-Smith**

Huia Publishers, 1997

(1 female)

In the words of the most important people in her life, the story of Kura unfolds. Auntie Lizzie, Uncle Walter, Kura's mother and her friends gradually reveal the special identity of Kura. Mana and strength will pass on to the next generation.

RE-SHAPING SHAKESPERE: OPHELIA THINKS HARDER



Jean Betts is a well-known name in the New Zealand theatre world. Jean's script *Ophelia Thinks Harder* is a very popular text amongst schools.

"I remember studying Hamlet at school, and like most other girls in my class, identifying with him and finding Ophelia alien; while at the same time being aware that even so, too often in my life I was judged not on how I measured up to Hamlet, but on how I compared to Ophelia. Few boys experience this trauma. It isn't fair. I dedicate this play to all the girls who felt and feel the same".

Jean Betts

LEFT: Sara Ninness as Ophelia in *Ophelia Thinks Harder*.

Robert Gilbert is the head of drama at Aranui High, and the National Secondary School Arts Coordinator for drama. Aranui High School produced a season of *Ophelia Thinks Harder*. Robert reflects on the process and outcomes of this performance and text.

What attracted you to the text of *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, and why did you choose to programme it?

I made the decision to do *Ophelia Thinks Harder* last year when planning the 2006 drama programme for our school. There were several things that influenced that decision: The Court Theatre were doing *Hamlet* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and I planned for my senior students to see those plays; I wanted to do excerpts from *Hamlet* for our 2006 entry in the Sheilah Winn Festival of Shakespeare in Schools; like many schools, I have more girls than boys involved with drama, and finding suitable plays with decent roles for girls is always a difficulty; and Aranui High School has a strong tradition of presenting challenging theatre. *Ophelia Thinks Harder* just fit-the-bill in so many ways.

How involved were the students with the creative process, and what elements did you feel the students engaged with the most?

Well, when I outlined the year's programme to my students, they really bought into it. "It's a kind of 'Hamlety' sort of year," as one student put it. The year 12 and 13 students had a say in some aspects during pre-production and planning. For example, I presented over a dozen images to them to choose one to help with the 'look' of the production and to be the main poster image. They discussed the images, what they liked – or didn't like – and why. They also thought about what image would attract the most interest from their target audience (the

Aranui High School community). They then voted, and that one image became the starting point for me as a director and influenced the set and costume design.

Senior students were keen to assist with set construction, and one cast member took it upon himself to design the sound for the production.

Do you believe that this production has shifted the students' perception of 'Shakespeare'?

As a teacher in a low-decile school, I'm constantly trying to find an 'in' with Shakespeare for my students. Some have been more successful than others. In the past I have set *Romeo and Juliet* in modern-day Christchurch, contrasting the affluent parts of the community with our school neighbourhood; or, this year, I set *Hamlet* in a Maori context. The students saw *Ophelia Thinks Harder* as a very cool play, and the production was made much easier by studying *Hamlet* first, seeing the Court Theatre productions and presenting *Hamlet* at the Sheilah Winn festival. This meant that the students were pretty well immersed in the literary influence to Jean Betts' play. For junior students, this play was a fantastic introduction to Shakespeare.

The play is driven by strong female characters, how successful do you believe you were as a director in bringing these to life?

Well, I am a director of theatre, not a director of 'feminist' theatre. Although I have directed feminist plays before, Lorae Parry's *Front Women* for example, I see my job as one who must understand all of the themes, issues, politics, and history of the play and the context in which it is written. My aim therefore, is to handle the author's work with passion, commitment, and sensitivity, just as I would with any play. That said, I was very aware that I could come under some scrutiny being a man directing this play, but I felt pretty confident with the integrity of my approach. So, to answer the question: bringing characters to life is what we do in theatre, strong, weak, women, men... I think we were pretty successful.

Coined as a 'feminist text', how do you believe this script successfully challenged the perception of women and women in relationships?

I love theatre that challenges perceptions. Aranui High School is a school that constantly endeavours to challenge perceptions, especially those surrounding social status and race. The rehearsal room was a great place for debate about all sorts of things: the role of women in society, the politics of relationships, and the politics of sex amongst other things – not your usually high school play, I must say, but pretty usual for our students.

How important do you believe it is for students to be exposed to plays like *Ophelia Thinks Harder*?

Vital. First of all that a New Zealander wrote the play raised the status of the script for the students. Jean Betts is one of us. Our young people are exposed to so much overseas culture, that when we have a taonga such as Jean's play, we need to treasure it, celebrate it, do it.

How was the performance received in the school and wider community?

There are some fairly challenging things in this play for anyone, let alone high school students. There's little doubt that one or two scenes raised a few eyebrows, but I can say with absolute confidence that the play was received with overwhelming acclaim. I sought the comedy within the play, not to undermine the 'message' but to honour the truly funny, and sometimes poignant, moments that surround the heavier issues. As the major production for 2006, *Ophelia Thinks Harder* was a triumph – thanks Jean.

***Ophelia Thinks Harder* by Jean Betts**

(Minimum of 9 (doubling) playing 23 characters)

Featuring Ophelia, her maid, St Joan and a couple of locals – Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Published by **THE PLAY PRESS**

www.playpress.co.nz

VIEWING YOUR OWN PLAYS



Kevin Boon on seeing his own work on stage.

Playwrights should take the opportunity to attend productions of their own plays whenever the opportunity presents itself. In this respect I have been fortunate in that I have attended performances of most of the plays I have written to date.

With regard to the performances and filming of the television comedy series *If You Can't Beat 'em* which I wrote some years ago, it was essential for me to attend not only the production and recording evenings, but rehearsals and all aspects of the production. Television drama was still relatively new in New Zealand at that time and the method of filming each episode, while it was being performed before a 'live audience' (of approximately 300) in the large studio at Avalon, had not been employed previously or (as far as I am aware) since.

After the television series was over I decided to try my hand at stage plays and I was delighted when Playmarket accepted my first three efforts. However, my initial enthusiasm was tepid when an 'old hand' warned me that productions of New Zealand plays by professional or amateur groups do not exactly come flooding forth.

With that in view I was delighted when, within the year, I received news that my first full-length play *The Geriatrics* was to be performed by the Otaki Players and as a Wellingtonian I arranged to see the play. I can still remember the excitement when, after driving around Otaki's back streets on a rather dark winter's night, my headlights lit up a poster saying 'World Premiere' *The Geriatrics* – by...Me!

My seat was in a good position and quite near an exit for a quick retreat if the show didn't go down well. Actually it was the last night and had a full house so I felt reasonably secure. I am pleased to report that it was a very good performance and well received by the audience. I stayed for the 'end of season' party and enjoyed meeting the director, cast and production team, who seemed pleased to have me present.

At this stage I should explain that the purpose of this article is not to critique or make comparisons between productions, but merely share some thoughts on what can be discovered from a writer's perspective.

In this particular case the play was produced as written, and the set, characters and staging were quite close to what I had envisaged when I wrote the play. The producer reported that she had not experienced any difficulties or impracticalities in staging the play. In a rewrite I made adjustments that eliminated a small set, so that the play could be performed entirely on a single composite stage setting. I also adjusted the play so that scene changes could be effected by employing either curtain or blackout. While viewing the play I noted some sections of the dialogue that could be tightened, developed or eliminated, all of which were very valuable when it came to the rewrite.

Recently I received the good news from Playmarket that *The Geriatrics* (in its rewritten form) was to be produced by Otamatea Repertory Theatre at Maungaturoto. After a certain amount of exploration I discovered an excellent 100 seat theatre in a large block of community facilities off the main road to Dargaville.

The play was well received by the audience and the party scene was highly successful (Otamatea are noted for their musical performances). It also received a favourable review in the local newspapers.

My main interest was in how the play functioned, as the director had (with my approval) incorporated two additional characters into the play. Generally they worked in well, although understandably their lines were limited. However, I would not have included them in all scenes.

If you have the opportunity to view your own play my advice is to....GO!

If you would like to view a full copy of this article please contact Playmarket.

***The Geriatrics* by Kevin Boon**

(4 female, 3 male)

Florrie's daughter thinks she's ready to be put out to pasture and that Mrs McGregor's Home for Retired Gentlefolk is the place for her. But Florrie has other ideas and her influence upon the hypochondriac Charles, the alcoholic Bob, and the waspish Hilda has amusing and traumatic results.

***Smoko* by Kevin Boon**

(5 male)

Power machinations between five factory workers come to the fore in this locker-room comedy. The cleaner, Georgie, holds court in the men's room where all must come for their smoko. His loyalties change according to the company, but he always comes out on top.

***Nothing's Ever Black & White* by Kevin Boon**

(5 female, 7 male)

Tama leaves his whanau and his turangawaewae to go to the city in quest of work. He learns many things, especially about industrial relations, prejudice and loyalty. All this is put to the test when he is squeezed out of a job at the factory and the gang return, seeking revenge. He discovers nothing is ever really black or white.

NZ SCRIPTS THAT DRAW FROM SHAKESPEAREAN TEXTS

***Shylock* by Janinka Greenwood**

(5 female, 4 male)

A group of young people put on a modern version of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* with music and social comment.

***Revenge Of The Amazons* by Jean Betts**

(12 female, 5 male)

Based on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with the mechanicals as a female theatre troupe and Oberon falling for a 'hard line feminist Easter bunny'.

***Thelma* by John Smythe**

(4 female, 5 male)

The death of her father forces Thelma K Redman to confront the 'real' free market world. *Thelma* is a timeless yet contemporary New Zealand story based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. A family focussed corporate thriller.

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 activities. 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.

IS YOUR SCHOOL A MEMBER?

Schools that wish to support the future of NZ theatre, join Playmarket. In return, you will receive our bi-annual publication, Playmarket News, a 10% discount off all script orders and a regular eBulletin.

CONTACTING US:

Playmarket

Level 2, 16 Cambridge Terrace
PO Box 9767, Te Aro, Wellington
Phone: (04) 382 8462
Fax: (04) 382 8461
Email: info@playmarket.org.nz
Website: www.playmarket.org.nz

The New Zealand Theatre Federation

Rm 304, Second Floor
The Cranmer Centre
32 Armagh Street
PO Box 3037, Christchurch
Phone: (03) 377 2303
Fax: (03) 377 2305
Email: NZTFNAT@xtra.co.nz
Website: www.theatrenewzealand.co.nz

Playbureau

PO Box 420, New Plymouth
Phone: (06) 757 3103
Fax: 0800 752928
Email: play.bureau.nz@xtra.co.nz
Website: www.playbureau.com

Australasian Performing Rights Association (APRA)

PO Box 6315, Auckland
Phone: (09) 379 0638 / 0800 692772
Fax: (09) 379 3205
Email: rluck@apra.com.au
Website: www.apra.co.nz