

NOVEMBER 2010

Newsletter



**Welcome to another issue of the NTP newsletter.
And I seem to have survived my first issue
as editor intact – so thanks for all the good
comments, very welcome.**

This issue has a mix of articles I hope will interest you, as well as the start of a new occasional series where we look at the background and work of some of our more successful playwrights. We'll be inviting writers to contribute to this from time to time on a basis of how many plays they have published and how many productions done. To kick us off and launch the series, the obvious first victim is Ian himself – with 35 plays published and hundreds of productions achieved.

Regular slots will include my own Michael's Musings contribution, Ian's State of the Union address, and our roundup of latest publications and productions. I'm also including review held over from last time, which I found interesting and informative in terms of how the playwright's work has been perceived by a perceptive reviewer. This is of an American production of an American play. America, as Ian has pointed out before, is a huge potential market for us all, so insights like this are valuable. And to continue the American theme, one of our own members, David Chase, an American himself, has kindly given us an inside look into his own marketing efforts on his home turf.

Bon appetit!

Michael



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Special Offers

IAN HORNBY

In collaboration with Amateur Stage Magazine

ONE

Reduced subscription for NTP members – normal annual subscription is £24. Call Chris on 0203 371 1850 and mention the reduced rate for NTP members.

TWO

Advertise with Amateur Stage, the only national magazine for the amateur dramatics market. We have negotiated a deal with the editor of the magazine that we can have a one-eighth page advert for £35 (+VAT), provided we can fill the page each month. This represents a very great saving on the normal price. Contact ian@plays4theatre.com for more details or to submit your advert.

And following right along from that...

Sardines Magazine

- The only publication I've ever seen that goes some way to bridging the chasm between amateur and professional theatre, but sadly, at the moment, only for the Home Counties (we're talking with them about a regional version) – is published quarterly. They called me moments ago about an article of mine they're publishing (about murder mystery scripts) and I mentioned the Amateur Stage deals. They have made a parallel offer. They cannot beat the Amateur Stage deal in terms of advertising per issue (since AS is monthly and Sardines three-monthly, but have offered a similar one-eighth page advert for £75 with zero VAT, effectively meaning you'd get 3 months for the price of two, but meaning a bigger outlay initially. It may appear a worse deal, but it does give a greater chance at being seen by Home Counties professional theatre companies if that's where your aims lie.
- They are also offering a reduced annual subscription of £9.99 if anyone is interested.
- Sardines have also started, at our suggestion, a writers' forum on their forums page - <http://www.sardinesmagazine.co.uk/forum/> - you need to sign up to join, but it's free and you can freely promote your work. We have a banner advert on that page too, so let's make it busy!
- Have your own website – our special offer still stands
- I've just had an article published in Amateur Stage magazine suggesting every theatre company should have a website, and the same holds true of writers. In these high-tech days it's the only realistic way to market your work.
- We still have the offer open to members – a domain (that's the bit starting www that you type in your browser), hosting (somewhere to store your website files) and the design and build of the site itself. All that for £125! (the hosting and domain have to be renewed each year at maybe £20 for the pair, but that's it).
- You also get an email address that is to your domain, so if you had www.fredbloggs.co.uk, your email address could be info@fredbloggs.co.uk or perhaps fred@fredbloggs.co.uk – much more professional looking than FredBloggs@hotmail.co.uk!



From the desk
of Ian Hornby...

The state of play today at New Theatre Publications

We continue to search out new places to advertise NTP and – by association – your plays. We have been in contact with many libraries and sent free catalogues, but with the financial situation as it is very few have any budget whatsoever for buying play scripts. As a tester, I have offered several libraries single copies of my own scripts (at my own expense) free of charge for their shelves. Some declined, others accepted some or all of the scripts on offer. Sadly we cannot afford to buy all your plays to give to libraries, but you may wish to do so yourselves.

Advertising in Amateur Stage Magazine and Amdram.co.uk has not produced any significant results, but various magazines, including Amateur Stage, DAWN (The Drama Association of Wales newsletter), the Scottish Community Drama Association (SCDA) newsletter and a number of regional publications will review submitted scripts as long as they're not inundated.

As you will hopefully know from emails, we have embarked on a process of adding additional cast details to the website catalogue. I changed my own website (www.scripts4theatre.com if you want to look) to enlarge the ages ranges and gender possibilities of my casts, and also to include the number of spoken lines for each character. That last bit can be done using a macro this end, but it does take time and will only be done if you specifically request it. In any event it's only a rough guide, since it only counts the number of times that character name (followed, as per the NTP house style, by a colon) occurs in the play. It takes no account of the number of words in each line, and writing such a macro to do that bit is well beyond me. Taken to a ridiculous extreme, any monologues will be reported as having one spoken line!

My thinking was that a theatre company looking for a play would get much more use out of "Detective Inspector Plod, m or f, aged 25-55, (172 spoken lines)" than out of DI Plod just being mentioned in the blurb.

The feedback from people visiting my site was

sufficiently positive to want to roll out the idea to the NTP site. This is entirely voluntary (the more of you that request it, the more work we have, so don't all rush at once!), but will explain the flexibility (or lack thereof) in your cast.

Going over well-trodden ground again, a company is more likely to be able to cast DI Plod (as described above) than a "DI Plod, male, aged 41, black hair, blue eyes". Companies reading that in your play or on the website may think, "hang on, we don't have any men who are aged 41 with black hair and blue eyes", when, in reality, such inflexible, fine detail is unnecessary. They won't even bother to read the play.

Taken further, the reader from the dramatic company may think, "Ah, this could be a part for Joe", but until they read the play, they won't know whether Joe would have too many lines for his fading memory, or lack of experience, or whatever. This expanded set of information can do no harm, it can only help.

Already the NTP website does more than any other publishers, even the market leaders. Samuel French, for example, have followed our lead to an extent by now allowing you to search by cast size, but you can only specify the number of male and female parts you want, not, as with NTP, the ranges. Should you be faced with having between 2 and 4 men and 2 and 6 women available, you'd have to search their site for 2m 2f, 3m 2f, 2m 3f, 3m 3f, 2m 4f... and so on, running each search after the previous one. With our site you can do the whole thing in one search. This means it is more likely that a theatre company will find YOUR play, and along the way NTP gains a reputation for being as helpful as possible to anyone searching for plays.

If you want to take advantage of this facility, get out a copy of your play (you can download one from the NTP site if you don't have one to hand) and look at the cast list. For each character, specify whether there are any options for gender (could DI Plod be a man or a woman?) and specify the range of ages possible. In many cases, of course, you could have a married couple (for example) where the ages could be anything from 20 to 60, but need to be compatible, assuming a 60 year old man and a 20 year old bride would not suit your plot. Send us the details and we'll get our macro to count the lines for you, then we'll add it to the blurb on the website. REMEMBER – you don't have to go through the boredom of counting lines yourself. Moving smoothly on to blurbs (I use the term

deliberately here, whereas previously we used "synopses"), I feel we could all do ourselves a better job. The blurb in question is almost always the same on the back cover of the play itself and in both the online and paper catalogues. Its purpose is to make the reader want to open the book and read on. That's it. It doesn't actually need to be (as most currently are) a potted version of the story. To illustrate by example, if we looked at the book(s)

"The Lord of the Rings", a far better selling job is done by:-

"The Lord of the Rings is an epic adventure of good defeating evil. The hobbit hero, Frodo Baggins, accepts the task of destroying the One Ring in the flames of Mount Doom, where it was forged, to destroy Lord Sauron's evil plans to dominate Middle Earth and all living things. On Frodo's journey of great challenges and extreme perils, he is aided by a loyal fellowship of magical creatures and the rightful king of Gondor, Aragorn."

Than by:-

"Frodo Baggins and his friends Samwise Gamgee (Sam), Meriadoc Brandybuck (Merry) and Peregrin Took (Pippin), have to take a ring given to Frodo by his uncle, Bilbo Baggins, to Mount Doom to throw it back into the flames. They meet Boromir and a dwarf (Gimli) and the elf (Legolas), who help them.

They are also helped by Gandalf, a wizard. There are evil creatures called Orcs who try and kill them, but lots of people help them along the way. They are followed by a creature called Gollum, who has a split personality..." and so on ad nauseum.

There is little point in putting the story in your blurb – use the space to achieve its aim, to persuade the reader to open the covers and read the storyline within. Potted storylines, mentioning all your characters by both name and function, become plodding and pedestrian. I urge you all to revisit your synopses with the aim of coming up with an advertising blurb. Try it out on people; ask them if it would tempt them to want to read more. When you have something you're happy with, mail it to us and we'll change your website entry.

One of our playwrights is an American who has recently returned to America, determined to market his play on

his own turf. His systematic approach looks as though it is paying dividends and we asked him to explain how he has gone about it.



Marketing your Playscript in America

DAVID CHASE

My play, As Fair As You Were was successfully premiered in April 2009 by a small community theater company in Vermont. NTP has now included it in their online catalog. Very nice, but how could I now show it to theater companies with similar interests?

If I were part of a theater company, for instance, how would I learn about a play I'd never heard of? NTP seems to be fairly proactive in its efforts to promote itself and its plays but theater people still need to troll through the online catalog reading the synopses and downloading the occasional script to see whether it's something they want to take further. I wanted to direct them to my play.

A bit of time with Google turned up <http://www.doollee.com/index.htm> one page of which led to theater websites around the world. I'm primarily interested in the US (at least for my first campaign) so I systematically opened the websites for each listed company and looked at their past seasons to get a sense of their interests. As Fair As You Were is an American play with a feeling rather like On Golden Pond. Single set, 4 females, 5 males, from mid 30s to late 70s. If they had a history of similar shows and large casts I plugged their email address into a data base in Word.

This is a time consuming process as each website has a different level of access. Some are open, some are not. If I found an Artistic Director, that's where I sent the email. Otherwise I picked the highest ranking person I could find. Often his name was "info".

Here's the email I sent...

All they need to do is click the link, read the synopsis, and download the script.

The emails all had my address on them and I've had several responses. When I told Ian what I was up to he told me it had already generated a lot of downloads. So at least it's now in front of them.

If you decide to launch a similar campaign, research the companies and limit your mailing to those with a history of similar shows. We're all in this together, after all - playwrights, companies, and actors - and no one appreciates a nuisance.

Subject line: New Play – free PDF reader's copy
"As Fair As You Were" is a new play recently published by New Theatre Publications. Below is a link to a site where you can download a free PDF of the full script for your inspection.
<http://www.plays4theatre.com/bookdetails.php?pr=800>
New Theatre Publications has over 600 plays in their catalog and licenses production of their plays around the world. If you're interested in their email newsletter, you can sign up for that elsewhere on their site.
In any case, please take a few moments to download and take a look at "As Fair As You Were".
Thanks,
David Chase

The Theatre Scene in America

The American theatre scene is not dissimilar to that in Britain. There are amateur (community) theater companies and there are stock (professional, equity) companies. Some, I suspect, are not-for-profit organizations. Most states seem to have a community theater organization of some sort but I've not explored them all. The doollee.com pages for each state mostly list these. As is true most anyplace, they're only as good as their members. Stock mostly refers to professional or semi-professional companies, meaning they usually pay the performers and crew. Equity companies probably pay union scale. Community theaters, which make up the vast majority of theater companies in the US, are apt to be entirely amateur and unpaid, except for the director of the shows and possibly a few management and technical people and even that is apt to be an honorarium. As with anything, when you try to define them, you realize they all take on a different form.

When I was working my way through all the websites, I found all sorts from places with a huge glittering stage where they could launch half a dozen flashy musicals a year with full orchestras to threadbare companies that might not even have a permanent home. Most of these smaller companies would be hard pressed to fit 150 people into the house. When my play was premiered in Vermont, a full house was 100 seats. If more people had turned up I think we'd have set up a few more around the edges, though.

I did realize after a while, that if the company had "community" in its name, that it would probably be more likely to appreciate my play. On the other hand, there were some of the flashy places that have done "Harvey", "Arsenic and Old Lace", and "Our Town", so you never know.

Generally, I suspect the US is much more relaxed around form. Probably comes from a long history of trying to keep the British off balance.

About the Author

David Chase is an American who is moving back to the US after 4 1/2 years enjoying England. He has experience as a father, a carpenter, a newspaper columnist, an organic gardener, a performer in nearly 40 stage shows, a bus driver, a playwright, author of a novel (still in the wings), and has the great good fortune to be married to Susan Shaw.



Some work and submission opportunities

A number of current or ongoing opportunities reflecting the American theme of this edition of the newsletter.

Last Frontier Theatre Conference Call for Plays

The Last Frontier Theatre Conference has released its Call for Plays for the 2011 Play Lab. The Conference takes place from June 12-18, 2011. Selected plays receive public readings at the Conference, with both public and private feedback sessions led by theatre professionals. Authors must register for the Conference and be in attendance for their reading.

This Play Lab will feature plays from 20 minutes to 2 hours in length. Accepted writers will also have an additional opportunity to present their work in the 10-Page Play Slam, the Monologue Workshop, and the late-night Fringe Festival.

The submission guidelines are as follows:

- Plays must be received by December 31, 2010.
- Submissions should include an approximate running time for the play, between 20 minutes and 2 hours.
- The play must not have received a professional production; readings and amateur productions are acceptable.
- No musicals are accepted.
- One submission per author.
- Plays can be submitted via e-mail as either a PDF or Word document to dmoore@pwscc.edu.

Plays presented at the Conference have gone on to productions throughout Alaska and the rest of the United States due to the exposure received there. Updates about this year's Conference will be posted at <http://www.pwscc.edu/conference>. Questions can be addressed to Conference Coordinator Dawson Moore at 907-834-1614 or dmoore@pwscc.edu.

The Deconstructive Theatre Project

We accept material on a rolling basis and prefer in-development pieces that coincide with our mission (<http://www.deconstructivetheatre.org/mission.html>). Please send a synopsis or development idea and, if applicable, a 10-20 page dialogue sample. Works of musical theatre should include a recording of 2-3 musical moments, and dance pieces should include an appropriate description of the proposed work as well as any supporting materials. Please allow up to four weeks

for a response.

Material may be sent to: The Deconstructive Theatre Project, Inc. c/o Adam J. Thompson, Producing Artistic Director 29-33 Wellington Street, # 103, Boston, MA 02118 or e-mailed to NewWork@deconstructivetheatre.org

Calling for full length play submissions!!!

If you have a great full length play that has yet to be produced, we are looking for you! We are based out of Los Angeles and are interested in allowing a playwright the opportunity to showcase their talent to an audience!

Our preliminary timeline is to open in late September, so we want to begin reading material as soon as possible. If you have something that is important to you, a passion project that just hasn't had a chance to see the light of day, something that will knock the breath right out of the audience's lungs, send it over. We aren't limiting genre at this stage. We are open to everything, as long as it is full length. Please email: lydiablanco@hotmail.com

Playwrights Horizons

Seeking new full-length plays by American playwrights on any topic, in any genre, including musicals. No one-acts, one-person shows, non-musical adaptations, translations, children's shows, screenplays, or works by non-U.S. writers. Plays must not have been produced in New York City. Submit full script with a cover letter, author's bio, and SASE. If submitting a musical, include a CD. NO FEE. Adam Greenfield, Literary Manager, OR Kent Nicholson, Director of Musical Theatre, Playwrights Horizons, 416 West 42nd St., New York, NY 10036, <http://www.playwrightshorizons.org/workph.html>.

Wings Theatre

(New York, NY) – Produces a year-round season of new plays by American playwrights. Plays must fall into one of 2 categories: The Gay Plays Series (plays or musicals with a major gay character or theme), or The New Musicals Series (musicals on any subject or theme). Submit full-length plays only, typed and bound. NOTE: Postal mail submissions only. NO FEE. Script Coordinator, Wings Theatre, 154 Christopher St., New York, NY 10014, <http://www.wingstheatre.com/script.html>

Some work and submission opportunities

Point of You Productions was formed when its Artistic Director, Jeff Love, walked out of a bookstore after finishing Shakespeare's revenge tragedy Titus Andronicus and found himself in a throng of protesters speaking out against the Diallo trials, demanding that the policemen involved in shooting an innocent man be punished.

Wishing to convey to New York City the moral that revenge leads to destruction, he produced Titus Andronicus with a modern-day police state setting. Expecting this to be a one-time endeavor, he was surprised to find that by the end of the run, he had a small company of actors and technicians asking, "What's next?"

What was to be next was calling upon Johnny Blaze Leavitt, Point of You's Executive Director. Johnny was attracted to the idea of building a company whose mission is to produce original and classical works that convey a relevant moral relating to issues in today's society.

The pair agreed that art, and especially theatre, in New York City had become sensationalized and spectacle-oriented, taking focus away from its purpose: to enlighten. They feel that an audience needs to hear stories that pose important, thought provoking questions about what drives them to act the way they do in their daily lives.

Jeff began searching for appropriate material - classical or original - and develop how the audience should hear and see this material. Johnny Blaze Leavitt began assembling talented individuals committed to producing quality theatre and researching what would be needed for the new company to compete in such a large theatre community.

This is the essence of what Point of You is: the Artistic Director works to enrich the audience while the Executive Director creates the environment where artists can collaborate and build a collective body of work to be proud of.

Want to write for Point of You? Send your scripts to scripts@pointofyou.org
<http://www.pointofyou.org/index.htm>

The Treehouse Theatre Company seeks new full-length plays for our premiere season in 2010-2011. Because we are new, we will only be looking for 1-2 plays for our mainstage, but are highly interested in forming relationships with playwrights whose work we like. Please send us your work, and if we are interested, we will help your play find a stage.

We are looking for only full-length plays that have not had a professional production, though readings and workshops are fine. We accept electronic submissions only and plays should be sent to submissions@treehousetheatre.org with the full play, a synopsis, a cover letter, and a character breakdown; attachments should be in either Word or PDF formats. We promise to reply within one-month of submission.

While we accept plays of all styles, we are particularly interested in work that explores powerful humanistic elements; that show a spark of life and are not scared of making audiences uncomfortable. If you would like to contact us for any further information, please send an e-mail at stephen@treehousetheatre.org

Revolving Stages seeks 10-minute plays by Black Playwrights
Seeking 10-minute plays by Black playwrights that reflect experiences of the global African diaspora (i.e., Africans, African-Americans/ Caribbean/Europeans) for staged readings at the Harlem YMCA's Little Theater, NYC.

All playwrights must select their own director or playwrights can direct or read their own plays.

Limit of 1 – 3 characters only. Small, modest carfare paid to performers.

Please send contact information with your scripts to:

Eleanor Herman, Executive Director
94 East 1st Street, #19J NYC 10019 Attention:
Revolving Stages

This opportunity is ongoing.



Michael's Musings: Aristotle

An occasional series on some of my current preoccupations

From a history of drama point of view they don't come any more important than Aristotle. He's generally credited with inventing critical theory and practice for the theater, so we should all really celebrate his anniversary on an annual basis (any excuse for a party!).

I thought I had him summed up in my mind quite neatly as being the inventor of that interesting but mostly totally ignored rule of the three Unities. This I've always understood was based on his analysis of the phenomenal number of successful plays being written at the time, especially those of that mega-dramatist (to combine two Greek words) of the time, Sophocles. Since these guys were basically following these rules anyway, and audiences flocked to their productions in their thousands, ergo, following the rules leads to success.

The Unities of Time, Place and Action, I always understood, meant firstly that a play should run in continuous time. I don't think this meant no intervals; after all the ancient Greek bladder probably had performance specs similar to our own – but more likely no intervals followed by a new scene "the following morning" or "two months later".

Likewise Unity of place meant exactly that – one location. No shifting from the lounge to the dining room to the street outside and then to an apartment in upper Manhattan. Everyone needed in the story came to the chosen location before making their entrance. But Unity of action I never really investigated in depth. I just assumed that the main plot was all one saw on stage – no diversionary sub-plots running in parallel.

And that, give or take, was what Aristotle (I thought) basically amounted to. But no, not quite! Over the last few months I've been fairly immersed in Jeffrey Hatcher's "The Art and Craft of Playwriting" and jolly good stuff it is too. He has quite a lot to say about Aristotle, so it's been fascinating to upgrade my appreciation as a result.

Aristotle's theory of drama "The Poetics" was written in the fifth century BC. He itemised some six "elements" for successful plays: action/ plot, character, thought/ ideas, language/ diction/ verbal expression, music/ song, spectacle/ image/ visual adornment. In that order – though as Hatcher says, we tend to put character first today but that's largely because character is best expressed through action. A strong character pursuing a strong personal agenda generates action. If a dramatist has action as his starting point, his first task is to define the right character to pursue that action. On the other hand, if he starts with a particular character then his plot may be dictated to him by that character. Meshing the two satisfactorily is quite challenging. (NB this is a simplified generalization! But a mismatch between main character and a play's action can be fatal).

Concerning subplots in relation to Action, I'm not much wiser. Although characters come and go, and interact with each other in different combinations in, for example, Sophocles three Theban plays, I do feel everything progresses the main plot in effect, and that subplots must be basically post-Aristotelian (to posit what may be an innovative academic concept!).

Aside from Action, the other two, (better known), unities of Time and Place are obvious in the Theban plays. "Oedipus the King" and "Antigone" both take place "Before the royal palace at Thebes", and the middle play "Oedipus at Colonus" is acted out "in a rustic landscape". And in all three the action plays out in real time.

Here however I have a slightly raised eyebrow, having just read Aeschylus' "Agamemnon". At the start, victorious bonfire signals instantaneously cross the south-west Eurasian landscape all the way from the newly-defeated Troy to the port near Agamemnon's home city-state of Argos some 300 miles away (appreciably more by sea) – and only 22 pages later a Herald announces the imminent arrival on stage of Agamemnon and his now landed

army. That's one helluva fast journey! Not even Easyjet could do that! So – some “artistic licence” was allowed then!

In each play, too, the ideas content is high. To quote someone “that philosophical profundity and psychological insight that characterize great Greek tragedies and give them the power to rivet the attention, fascinate the intellect, and purge the emotions of pity and awe” (the latter being of course the well known “Catharsis!”).

Now moving forward in time (historical that is): certainly (in my view) the mediaeval Mystery plays are full of subplots – and ignore the Unities of time and place as well. But my knowledge of Roman theatre (the major drama movement between Greek theatre and the Mediaeval period) isn't strong enough to know if they invented the subplot or not. My volumes of plays by Terence and Plautus show that both use an adapted Greek architectural set (ie Unity of Place): all these plays seem to be set in the street between two houses. But Plautus has a number of scene breaks which allow skipping a passage of time, whereas Terence doesn't. There is a note in the Terence volume that “his chief original contribution was the double plot”. So, all in all, it looks as though the Roman playwrights (and possibly even the later, Hellenistic, Greek writers) acted as a transition period for the development of drama from at least two of Aristotle's three Unities to the free-flowing forms we know from Mediaeval times forward – and the Mystery Play writers seem to be the ones who got rid of the final Unity of Place (perhaps due to the fact these plays were often performed on a series of mobile carts, a bit like the Somerset Carnivals).

I'll just wrap up by saying that - a bit like Sophocles (123 plays but only 7 remaining) - most of Aristotle's work exists as unpublished fragments. However he had a major impact on virtually every field of knowledge: logic, metaphysics, ethics, politics, rhetoric, poetry, biology, zoology, physics and psychology (all Greek words in fact!). And this impact influenced Medieval philosophy (e.g. Saint Thomas Aquinas), Islamic philosophy, and the whole Western intellectual and scientific tradition. (And just in case you're wondering, this last paragraph mostly quotes from Chambers Biographical Dictionary!).

But never mind that – “the play's for thing” after all (as someone once said) – so it's Aristotle's “Poetics” that are our Thing.

Finally, and quite coincidentally, my research for this piece threw up something of special interest to all of us – about our arguable Founder! The first prize in the 534 BC drama contest held at the Theater of Dionysus Eleutherius in Athens was won by a chap from Icaria, a village near Marathon. His name was Thespis, bless him!

Curtain please!

Michael

About the Author

Michael Barry is an internet publisher in addition to writing plays. With a Health Education element in his background, his focus is on health matters, especially on maintaining health and preventing disease. Find out more on www.keep-your-health.info.



“The Writer in Writing”

IAN HORNBY

An occasional series profiling a successful NTP playwright

Born in 1949 in Liverpool, my family moved to Timperley, Altrincham, when I was two, and I lived there until marriage at 22. I was educated at Sale Grammar School, thereafter at Salford University where I attained a BSc degree in Electronics – I knew from my teens exactly what I wanted to do! I spent many years working in electronics, most notably with Ferranti Computer Systems.

It was at the age of 40 I first became involved in Amateur Dramatics when a local ADS found themselves short of a man and – to my own amazement – I volunteered to take the part of Godfrey Pond in John Dighton's “The Happiest Days of Your Life”.

That was it – I got the bug instantly and wanted to do more, but babysitting problems meant I couldn't make the next one. But the bug was there and I decided, perhaps naively, that “I could write a play”. I did, producing my first work, “An Eye for an Eye, Darling”. At the drama group I started with the attitude that I always wanted the biggest part – it took me a while to realise that biggest is not always best and I developed a love for character parts. I also became involved with set design and build, lighting and sound – useful to have a knowledge of when you write plays. After a few years they allowed me to direct plays – something I enjoy to this day. The group – more out of flattery than desire, I suspect – decided to stage “An Eye for an Eye, Darling” and were as surprised as I was that it received excellent reviews and was accepted by a publisher, spurring me on to write more and more, up to my current total of 36.

I became a judge in the George Taylor Memorial Award (for festival-winning one act plays) for 2 years, but my real love has always been full length plays.

In 1997 I co-founded (with Paul Beard) The Playwrights' Co-operative and New Theatre Publications. When Paul, a retired policeman, emigrated to Australia a few years ago, I bought out his half.

My published plays have been performed all over the English-speaking world and four have been translated (one into Turkish, one into Spanish and two into Japanese). I try to go and see as many as I can so as to network with members of the ADS community. I also write books and have had some 15 short novels published under a few noms-de-plume. I am currently seeking a publisher for a full-length mainstream crime thriller which I want to publish under my real name.

Seven years ago I separated from my first wife and now live in Warrington with Alison, whom I married in March 2008. She is also heavily involved in amateur drama and we are both members of The Bridgewater Players (BWP) in Thelwall. As well as acting, we both became involved with backstage activities and with directing.

As a subsection of BWP, we have a group called Dying 4 Dinner, who regularly stage murder mystery evenings in local restaurants, pubs, clubs and hotels. This exciting new form of theatre allows plenty of opportunity for improvisation as well as scripted set pieces.

I occasionally do film extra work and have been in the New Harry Potter movie “The Deathly Hallows”, the John Lennon biopic “Nowhere Boy” and the more recent “Crimes That Shook Britain” TV episode about the Dunblane shooting. I did actually see myself in “Nowhere Boy” (thanks to fast work on the DVD pause button) but I don't expect to be seen in Harry Potter!

At any time I probably have 15 to 20 plays at various stages of incompleteness. I get an idea, develop it then run out of further ideas. Some I go back to, others still fester on my computer. One or two ideas contain no more than a couple of sentences, but I'd rather keep them just in case. Ideas come from anywhere, such as my Comedy "The Cat's Away", which arose from the joke question "How long have you been suffering from amnesia?" With the answer "I can't remember" – quite a small beginning for a 3 act play.

Plays I wish I'd written:-

1. Comedy - "Noises Off" – I could have done it, but Mike Frayn got in first. Actually, I know I'd never have written "Noises Off", not because I don't think it's brilliant, and I am very jealous of how good it is, but because I write for the Amateur Theatre market and there are very few groups who could create the necessary rotating stage set.
2. Drama - "The Woman in Black" – this has everything from a twist in the plot to tension, dramatic creativity, well-written script, incredibly imaginative use of set and props and that brilliant moment of the scream, where whole audiences, even those who have seen it before and know what's coming, jump out of their seats in shock and quickly start to laugh as a tension reliever.

My most successful play has been "Hello, Is There Any Body There?" (it's also NTP's most successful play). It was while writing this I learned, more by luck than deliberation, that audiences are a lot cleverer and a lot more imaginative than we often give them credit for. You can imply things and they'll get it. That goes with script and set. You can have gently running gags and they'll follow you. If they don't get a joke, forget it; don't labour with an explanation, because it ceases to be funny. Characters in situations are usually more amusing than just situations, so we should write things that the actors want to do and believe in. I learned that we cannot anticipate audience reaction (it always amuses me when writers of pantomimes actually include scripted lines labelled AUDIENCE:). We cannot rely on them saying or doing what we want, so we have to have a script that's credible no matter how they react (or don't react).

In "Hello..." I originally put in a scene where one of the characters goes into the audience and (using actions only) accuses members of that audience of doing the murders. All the time the dialogue continued on stage, but in the hands of a good actor, those on stage may as well not say anything – they no longer have audience focus. Lesson learned. When I've done that since (I have now written two plays using the same characters and similar plots), I make sure nothing vital to the plot can be hidden by anticipated audience laughter, while at the same time keeping it interesting should the audience be subdued and unresponsive.

Perhaps the most important lesson of all was the acceptance that - no matter how visual we are when we write (and I can always see my plays unfold in glorious, colourful 3D when I write them) - the actual product we deliver to theatre companies is two-dimensional and black and white. It has to be handed over to the actors to give it colour and depth. And when I say "hand over" I mean just that. They bring it alive and it's enormously flattering when they give life to our creations. But we have to allow them their artistic licence in what is, ultimately, a joint venture. They may read your character in a totally different way than your intention, and you have to take that on the chin. Never argue, never criticise.

When we write, we are the characters' gods; we created them; without us they had no life; all that they are is what we made them. But we have to set our children free; we have to allow them to live, to breathe, to develop, and that is the job of both actors and director. But what is quite a shock to the system is when you meet one of your creations, exactly as you imagined them, face to face. I try to get to see as many of my plays as I can when groups stage them, and very occasionally I will meet my creation. I always ask to meet the cast afterwards – to thank them for the performance and



for bringing my creations to life (and to try to sell them something else!) That's when you discover that your perfect Lord of the Manor Sir Malcolm, with his finely cultured voice and assertive confidence is actually the local butcher whose accent betrays his Dublin birthplace!

The world of theatre – an infinite series of possibilities and surprises.

Michael suggested I perhaps include favourite plays (done that already), music, films and so on. If I was asked to suggest a couple of films that show the writers' art to perfection, I think I'll probably surprise you with my answers. First, I'd choose "Waking Ned" (if you haven't seen it, you should) which has a number of those TV/film actors that you know but can't quite remember the names of in a story that's so delightfully quaint compared to the modern Hollywood blockbusters (it has no car crashes, no explosions, no aliens). It defies epic status. If this sounds nationalistic I apologise, but I doubt it could (or would) have been made anywhere other than in the British Isles. Now I hate "chick flicks" (hey, I'm 6 feet 2 and all man!) but I had to applaud the way "Love Actually" was put together. There are so many sub-plots you lose count and lose track until they resurface. And they are all wending their way through a seemingly disparate set of situations until they all wind together at the end. Add that to the plays I wish I'd written, but, like riding a moped, it's fun to do provided nobody sees you.

As for music, I'd name two inspirations. In chronological order, I always liked the music of the US band The Byrds, and it took me some time to realise that the part of the sound that magnetised me was the jangling 12-string guitar of Roger McGuinn, who still performs today at the age of 68. I even bought one of his limited edition "signature" guitars, but it sits there as if pointing out what an inadequate guitarist I actually am.

Secondly, and more importantly, is the music of Mary-Chapin Carpenter. As well as writing beautiful music, she is a superb wordsmith, using metaphor in ways I could only dream of. My father brought me up with the attitude that a man is both an island and a rock, to stand tall, proud and unemotional whilst leaving the emotions to lesser beings. It was left to my lovely wife Alison to put a lie to that stance, and Mary-Chapin became the tap that switched it on. She can make the hairs on this old cynic's neck curl with her words, and make the emotions swell and churn. Maybe it doesn't work for everyone, but she moves me. And on her UK tour in November I will be in the audience (at Buxton Opera House) being so churned. I know she does not write plays, but there are some powerful lessons in the craft of writing to be gleaned by listening to the music and reading the words. OK, sermon over.



Further reading....

- www.scripts4theatre.co.uk – my personal website
- www.bridgewaterplayers.co.uk – BWP
- www.dying4dinner.co.uk – murder mystery events



A Perceptive Review

Finally for this issue I found the following review of a play produced in the US last year interesting and instructive. Maybe you will too?

Guy Gets Girl BY KAREN FAIRHAM

Rebecca Gilman is one of our most gifted contemporary women writers so that it's not surprising that prestigious theater companies have given her plays effectively staged, and well cast productions. Last season *Spinning Into Butter* created a buzz at Lincoln Center, currently her latest, *Boy Gets Girl*, is keeping MTC's main stage filled.

With the stage bereft of gripping thrillers many theater goers have forgotten or never experienced the excitement possible only with a live crime drama. Thus upon hearing the basic premise of Ms. Gilman's play they're likely to view it as a theater piece masquerading as a movie or an episode from *Law & Order*: A woman goes on a blind date, writes the man off as not worth pursuing only to find him in hot pursuit, in fact, a dangerous stalker and the smart, independent New York career gal is transformed into a helpless victim. But while the situation is indeed something likely to crop up on the small or big screen, *Boy Gets Girl* is not a cheap thriller. Instead it is a skillfully crafted play that delves into serious contemporary issues without excessive moralizing. It fits the thriller genre but is not afraid to break from its conventions with an ending that fails to offer the customary neat solution to the crime or the victim's dilemma. Combine this with deft touches of humor, fully evolved characters and the little known, but well worth getting to know cast from the play's premiere production at Chicago's Goodman Theatre, and you have two hours of theater with enough pluses to offset the occasional lapses into didacticism.

Mary Beth Fisher is dazzlingly human as Theresa Bedell, the thirty-something magazine writer who becomes embroiled in a blind date from hell. Attractive and independent, she's been too focused on her career to develop any relationships. It's been over a year since the last man in her life left for a far-flown longterm assignment and so she allows herself to be fixed up by a well-meaning former colleague. By the time she's finished her get-acquainted beer with Tony (Ian Lithgow) we know that she's too smart for the nice but awkward and overeager to please nerdy guy. Sophisticated and self-sufficient as she is, Theresa allows herself to be talked into one dinner date before telling Tony that she can't see him again. She tries to let him down easy by saying that she's too busy for any sort of relationship and it's only after he barrages her with unwanted flowers and barges into her office, apparently convinced he can change her mind, that she quite firmly and somewhat angrily rejects him..

The progression from a date that could be a comedy skit followed by Tony's floral barrage and the tense confrontation in Theresa's office stylishly prepares us for the shift in mood. What gives the play its impact is that as the situation turns genuinely ominous, with *Boy Gets Girl* becoming a case of *Boy Hurts Girl*, Ms. Gilman never sacrifices characterization to chills and thrills. In fact, it is the way the trauma of the stalking unpacks layer after layer of Theresa's psyche that lifts the play out of psychodrama-case history and into a genuinely human drama.

Ian Lithgow's Tony is an interesting mix of gallantry and gaucheness. His slightly too loud and too intense manner almost immediately contradict the American as apple pie nice guy first impression. The rest of the cast takes makes the most of the meaty parts given them: Matt DeCaro as Theresa's boss Howard . . . David Adkins as her writing colleague Mercer . . . Howard Witt as Les Kennkat, one of Theresa's interview subjects who's trying to relaunch the cheap sex film career born out of his passion for big-breasted women. . . Shayna Fern's as the air-headed and inadvertently destructive office assistant . . . Ora Jones as the over-burdened, sympathetic policewoman assigned to the case. The filmmaker and the secretary are the comic relief characters and Witt especially, turns what could easily be a cartoon into a marvellous portrait of a thoroughly likeable old lecher with his heart in the right place.

The plot has its lapses. The setup of the workplace somehow lacks complete authenticity. Ms. Gilman's tendency to give everyone of her characters equal time for reacting to her issues bring lapses in the tension and but not enough to detract from the building tension. Her very open-ended finale may disappoint conventional crime story fans, but it will leave you with plenty to chew over vis-a-vis the potentially dangerous effect of the objectification of women and the ineffectiveness of law enforcement agencies to protect victims of the resulting crimes.

The play's design, like the cast, is also a carryover from the Chicago staging. Michael Phillip's revolving set (outdoor cafe bar and restaurant of the disastrous date, Theresa's office and Les Kennkat's, Theresa's apartment and Kennkat's hospital room) add a cinematic expansiveness to the action. The old porno king and the ditzy secretary are especially well served by Nan Cibula-Jenkins' costumes. Though director Michael Maggio did not live to supervise the transfer, MTC's Lynne Meadow as supervisor, has remained true to his very solid direction.

It's more than likely that *Boy Gets Girl* will enjoy many other productions after it completes its current run. While it is likely to stir much discussion it's not likely to do much to promote the popularity of the blind date.

About the Author

Learn how To Approach Any Woman, Anywhere And Know Exactly What To Say To Get Her To Give You Her Number And Go On A Date With You. *Guy Gets Girl* Review *Guy Gets Girl* Is The 1st And only Step-By-Simple-Step - Pickup, Dating And Seduction Guide On The Internet Written For Men...By A Woman! Download *Guy Gets Girl*!





Recently published plays

1979 (Tony Stowers) – FL drama, 19m 7f

Allo, Allo, Allo (Est There Any Body La?) (Ian Hornby) – FL farce, 3m 4f

As Fair as You Were (David Chase) - FL play, 5m 4f

The Babes in the Jungle (Anne Graham) – FL panto, variable cast
The Brother's Wife (Paul Howard Surridge) - FL play, 4m 4f

Cathy's War (Claire Booker) – 1A drama, 1m 1f

A Chance Meeting (Beth Browning) – 1A drama, 3m 1f + male body/dummy

Cinderella (Jilly McNeil) – FL panto, 3m 5f + extras

Colours (Tony Stowers) – 1A drama, 3m 2f + 2 children

Confessions of A Rock n Roll Star (Tony Stowers) – FL play, 1m

The Conformist (Tony Stowers) – 1A play, 1m

The Contract (Stephen O'Sullivan) – 1A, 7m 2f

Family Business (Linda Smith) – 1A play, 6f

Für Elise (Tim Kenny) – FL comedy, 4m 3f +1

Gauguin's Ghost (Tony Stowers) – 1A play, 9m 2f

The Grave (Melville Lovatt) - 1A play, 2m

Hanging in There (Geoff Saunders) – FL play, 4m 3f (min)

Indian Summer (Anne Graham) – 1A drama, 2m 5f

Jumpers (Patrick Cannell) – 1A comedy, 3m

King Cat (David Grant) – FL play, 9m 7f

The Kiss (Melville Lovatt) - 1A tragi-comedy, 2m 1f

London Cousins (Tony Stowers) – 1A play, 1-3m

My Brother Jake (Tony Stowers) – 1A play, 4m 3f

The Mystery of Aladdin's Lamp (Michael Marsh) - FL panto, variable cast

No Tears for Miss Chisholm (Janette Walkinshaw) – 1A comedy/drama, 2m 1f

Nothing Old, Nothing New (Anne Graham) – FL farce, 4m 4f

The Old Fox (Mike White) – 1A comedy, 4m 2f

Pressure (Tony Stowers) – 1A play, 2m 1f

Purgatory Park (Steve Abbott) – FL comedy/drama, 5m 3f

Road Hill House Murder, The (David Morrison) – FL drama, 8m 4f (with doubling)

Scars (Tony Stowers) – 1A play, 5m 2f

Somebody Up There Likes Us (Tony Stowers) – 1A play, 1m 1f

Space Jockey (Tony Stowers) – 1a monologues, 1-5m

Space Station (Tony Stowers) – 1A play, 2m

Where There's A Will... 3m5f (Ian Hornby) – FL farce, reissued for new cast



Some recent performances...

Cliff's Edge (Paul Beard) – Knaresborough

Dial 01673 for Murder (Ivor King) – Reading

The Missing Medallion (Peter and Paddy Ariss) – Yass, Australia

Up The Garden Path (Paul Beard) – Bolton

We're Gonna Win the Cup (Steve Kellett) – Worksop

Situation Vacant (Ian Hornby) - Colwyn Bay

Murder At The Cathedral (Ron Nicol) - Kirk Ella (Hull)

United in Darkness (James Peterson) – Wimborne, Dorset

The Worst Day of My Life (Alan Richardson) – Portsmouth

A Battle of Wills (Martin Ladbrook) - Coggleshall

The Spy Who Came in for the Phone (Alan Richardson) – New York

The Winter Of Discontent (Ian Hornby) – Kegworth (Derby)

Cliff's Edge (Paul Beard) – Grays, Essex

Dial 01673 for Murder (Ivor King) – Lincoln

An Eye For An Eye, Darling (Ian Hornby) – Biggin Hill, Kent

The Road Hill House Murder (David Morrison) – Norwich

Jayne with a Y (Ian Hornby) - Bourne, Lincs.

Robin Hood (Ian Hornby) - Lancaster

The Canary Cage (Diana Raffle) - Swindon

The Spy Who Came in for the Phone (Alan Richardson) - Kings Somborne, Hants.

An Eye For An Eye, Darling (Ian Hornby) - Freethorpe, Norfolk

Grandad (Tom Casling) - Durham

The Worst Day of My Life (Alan Richardson) - Sutton Coldfield

Wait Until The Ghost Is Clear (Ian Hornby) - Darwen, Lancs.

Dial 01673 for Murder (John Anthony) - Lincoln

Swingers (Paul Beard) - Kilwinning, Ayrshire

The Mayhem Players Present Love In A Transylvanian Mist (David Welsh) - Shrewsbury



Payments to and from NTP

As you've all probably heard, the banks plan to phase out paper cheques over the next few years. For obvious reasons, this has been a subject of intense debate, but we do see some benefits from our end. You can already pay for scripts, licences, reader fees and subscriptions via credit and debit cards on the site, and this has proven to be very popular, but there are other ways to pay, such as PayPal (if you prefer), which should be sent to our account at info@plays4theatre.com

Alternatively, if you do electronic or telephone banking, our details are:-



Account name: NEW THEATRE PUBNS Sort Code: 09-06-66 Account number: 41722864 Bank: Santander

This works both ways, of course. Some members already have their royalties paid directly into their banks, and we'd like to reduce the amount of paper and postage we spend by direct transfer to as many members as possible. If you'd be happy for us to pay you that way, just email (or post if you prefer) your bank details to us.



Your Author Details

We've had a few emails recently from members who have attempted to alter their member details on our website, such as their email addresses. The author details are held in a database that the website uses to display whatever details are requested, but these details can only be altered by our administration screens. We hope you will appreciate the many reasons why we cannot give all members administrative access to the database. We could spend a lot of money getting admin screens built that you could use to update your details, but rather than spend a lot of cash that can otherwise be used for promotion of NTP plays, we believe it's easier if you just email us with any changes you want made – it's a matter of moments for us to do it.

For those members who don't have a profile page, you can get one (at no cost to yourselves) by sending us details of what you'd like on your page. It has to follow a certain format – just take a look at what's already there to get an example – but the text areas can say pretty much what you want to say. We have spaces for your "CV", for "work sought", contact addresses and even a photograph if you want. Any of your plays published by us will automatically be listed, but you can also send us details of any other writing work you want to show, whether published or not (even if it's with another publisher). And all that for free!

Feel free to let me know of any writing opportunities that come your way and that other members might be able to benefit from.

That's all for now, folks. Happy writing!

Michael

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