

# BACKCHAT

News from THEATRE NEW ZEALAND  
*Fostering Community Theatre in Aotearoa*  
Patrons Jennifer Ward-Lealand & Rawiri Paratene

October/November 2020 Vol.43 Issue 5



Gisborne Unity Theatre is performing *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller.

Abigail (Bo Jarratt) is infatuated with John Proctor (Lawrence Mulligan) and their adulterous affair doesn't bode well for the farmer in this story of petty rivalries and hysteria set in a society haunted by the spectre of satanic influences

*Photo by Elenor Gill*

[www.theatrenewzealand.co.nz](http://www.theatrenewzealand.co.nz)

## Honouring Our Talents



Every year we look into our membership and with your help, acknowledge those who have given unstintingly down the years. This year marking our Golden Anniversary, we bestowed six awards; two *Life Members*. (Bios on next page) the *David Brockett Award* (see below) and three *Meritorious Service Awards* details of which will be in the next Backchat. It is important that people know their contribution to our theatre community has been observed and acknowledged. It happens in other arenas of community activity, particularly sports. But I've noticed for some reason the performing arts can be a little diffident. 'Thank you' is so very easy to say.

As we close-in on the end of 2020, it's great to see groups offering workshops and scheduling productions. Re-incentivising. But what is it we in theatre actually do? It was Shakespeare who through Hamlet said "hold as 'twere, the mirror up to nature".

Over the past month I've seen such a variety of work: a gay love triangle, a make-up artist doing social work, a rock-musical murder love triangle, a famous iconic political figure, Navy boys on the town, teen romance. All these productions were in different genre. All hit the mark in capturing our attention and helped us to look at ourselves, holding up the mirror, reflecting back to us. But what was at the bottom of them all? The need for togetherness. The need for Love. Humanity.

When discussing programming I sometimes hear people say "We just give them what they want". But isn't that predictable and a little lazy? How do you know what you want unless you are exposed to new things? Theatre is like food - sometimes you don't know what you want until you taste it!

Expand the tastes of your audiences. Feed the appetite of your performers. Start a reading group to explore new works, subject-matter, performing styles. Stimulation of the mind is as important as any other part of the body. When you feed the mind, you feed the soul. Start reading.

Nga mihi  
*Bryan Aitken*  
National President

[www.playmarket.org.nz](http://www.playmarket.org.nz)

[www.playbureau.com](http://www.playbureau.com)



## TNZ's 50<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting

Eight gathered in Wellington on 6<sup>th</sup> September for the 50<sup>th</sup> AGM and pleasingly they were joined on Zoom by 9 groups of people representing various membership categories. In the time of Covid- 19 this could become the new normal. There were 11 apologies.

**Bryan Aitken** began his second year as President and **Paul Percy** was elected as Vice President. **David Cox** and **Margaret Robertson** remain as Treasurer and Secretary. Five people were elected to National Executive; **Steven Arnold**, **Lorna Ashton**, **Jake Hansen**, **Sam Lewis** and **Deborah Steele**. Co-opted to National Executive were **Ewen Coleman** as National TheatreFest Co-ordinator, **Mark Perry** for Internet Technical Support and **Phil Jones** as Health and Safety spokesperson.

TNZ's finances are healthy due to TheatreFest's success last year (53 entries) Thanks and congratulations were passed to Ewen Coleman for his endeavours.

**Jennifer Ward-Lealand** and **Rawiri Paratene** were thanked for their support as our Patrons and will be asked to continue in this role.

The **David Brockett Memorial Award** for outstanding contribution to backstage work over the past year was announced and later given to **Aaron Blackledge** who was nominated by Stagecraft Theatre, Wellington. Aaron worked tirelessly over the 19/20 summer on the lighting grid clean up at the Gryphon Theatre. He ran several sessions to train up operators and designers on how to use a new lighting board and provided emergency technical assistance to hirers of the theatre when they had issues.



Aaron Blackledge is flanked by Sam Perry of Stagecraft Theatre and David Cox, President of Wellington District Theatre Federation who made the presentation on behalf of the National President

To celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> year President Bryan announced two special Life Membership awards to **Murray Lynch** of Playmarket and **Doug Clarke** of Riccarton Players.



Murray began his career at *Four Seasons Theatre*, Whanganui, in 1973.

He has worked in theatre for forty-seven years, as an Actor, Director, Tutor, Dramaturg and supporter of both professional and non-professional practitioners.

Murray makes no differentiation. Theatre is Theatre and he works to ensure that all, be they community-based or professional, students, designers or writers, receive of his time and expertise to make a creative place a better place for all to exist in.

After a formidable career as a Director, he graduated Victoria University with a Masters in

Theatre, with distinction and, that is how he has run his life in theatre - with distinction. Murray has been a giver and supporter to all of us and as current General Manager for *Playmarket* script services, he has helped develop Theatre in Aotearoa to a high standard. We acknowledge his work across the board and welcome him.



Doug Clarke has had a life time involvement with theatre in both Canterbury and at national level since the 1960s. He joined Riccarton Players in 1964 and became their representative on BDL (British Drama League - see p 5) in 1966.

As well as directing well over 100 productions in many different genre locally he has been dedicated to the national festival system, entering many one act plays and reaching national finals six times. His directorial skills are augmented by expertise in sound, lighting, stage crew, set design

and construction, special effects and playwriting. He has shared this knowledge with countless people and encouraged the young to get into theatre.

Doug has also been dedicated to administration both locally and nationally. He has served on the Riccarton Players committee all his life in many capacities from President to newsletter writer and was the driving force behind the substantial conversion work needed to bring Riccarton Players its own theatre. He has used his skills at District level as part of the committee organising the annual one act play festival and has represented Canterbury on the National Executive culminating in his appointment as the paid executive and librarian of NZTF for a few years in the 1990s until arts funding dried up.

We salute his enormous theatrical achievement and welcome him as a Life Member of Theatre New Zealand.



## Fifty Years Ago

New Zealand Theatre Federation (NZTF) was formed in 1970 by the amalgamation of the British Drama League and the New Zealand Drama Council. Our first AGM was held on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1970 in Wellington from 9.45am - 4.05pm. *(They were given an hour off for lunch in the middle!)* The first national president elected was Gilbert Stringer, the inaugural Director General of Broadcasting.

Of the 82 society members represented at the AGM, twenty are still TNZ members: Dannevirke, Dargaville, Feilding, Howick, Hawera, Hutt Rep, Heretaunga, Khandallah, Levin, Marlborough, Napier, Nelson, New Plymouth, Riccarton, Rotorua, South Canterbury, Stagecraft, Te Aroha, Taumarunui and Wellington Rep. *(Think of the travel costs!)*

It was recorded a year later that there were 155 member societies, 26 high schools and 158 individuals. All 155 groups had to pay 20c for each of their own members to NZTF. Other funding came from the Queen Elizabeth Art Council \$8.500 *(so generous!)* with residual funds from BDL \$221 and NZDC \$124.

### Activities that first year were extraordinary:

1. Three Residential Theatre Schools: A youth theatre school at Rathkeale College in Masterton for 85 students over 8 days; a Shakespeare in the Classroom course in Auckland over 5 days with 33 teachers and a 10 day Summer School also at Rathkeale with 48 students. George Webby was the lead tutor assisted by Sunny Amey and David Tinkham among others. *(All these residential courses were oversubscribed!)*
2. A Youth Drama Conference in May chaired by Nola Millar: the 80 participants were divided into working parties to discuss the importance of Drama as a subject in the school curriculum.
3. The One Act Play Festival ran from July - September and 120 societies entered. Six productions were chosen for the Finals in Balclutha and the Milton Theatre Group was awarded the Book of Honour for *Black Comedy* by Peter Shaffer *(Wellington Rep produced this in their main bill last year)*
4. A Subsidy Scheme led to numerous theatre initiatives: Rotorua Little Theatre received the services of a guest producer *(Director)* for *The Waltz of the Toreadors*; Harlequin Theatre *(now Masterton Theatre Company)* had a tutor run a creative drama course; Marlborough received help from Raymond Boyce to convert a boathouse into a theatre and the Annual report gives a long list of other theatres that benefitted from weekend schools in various aspects of theatre.
5. A one act play writing competition was held. Joint winners were *Mr Jones and Mr Bones* by Eve Hughes and *The Trial* by Nancy Krinkle.
6. Each month the library in Cuba Street serviced approximately 100 requests for scripts - sets and reading copies. During the year 30 sets of 3 act plays and 60 sets of one acts were purchased. Work was started on compiling a new catalogue.
7. *Theatre* a quarterly publication was established. Editor - Mrs Meriol Buchanan

Staff working hard to keep all these balls in the air were Miss Judy Russell Secretary, Mrs Elsie Lloyd Librarian and a part time typist Mrs Kathy McDougall. *(How times have changed!)*



## Two iterations of the 24 Hour Play Challenge



Three years ago Lorna Ashton, started the 24 hour Play Challenge in **Hamilton**. This year she tried out the process as part of a team of three. See picture on left.

Six teams were entered. Steven Arnold was the adjudicator, playwright Devon Williamson was the script advisor and it was hosted by Hamilton Playbox again from 7pm Friday. The teams learnt that the genre was to be Skyfi, the props were a beachball, a lipstick, a surgical (Covid) mask, an imaginary ghost and a space ship. Ten phrases were given to be used in the dialogue.

Lorna writes “We had until about 9pm to suss out the basics and then it was go home or elsewhere and see you back here in the morning to get stuck in. We were able to go away and work on the play but staying at Riverlea with the script advisor present was much better. We were very pleased with the advice that Devon was able to offer.

All the teams had time allocated for wardrobe, props, additional set pieces, music, lighting and a technical rehearsal (or if you kept to the timeframe enough time to have a full run through). At exactly 7pm on Saturday the show started and our team called THE ASH went first. After the performances, there was a light supper whilst Steven made his decisions. Then everyone was back into the auditorium to get the glad bags, certificate before going home happy and looking forward to next year.”



Last weekend **Wellington District Theatre Federation** organised a 24 hour Play Challenge along similar lines and such was the fun had by all it will become a regular feature on the District’s calendar along with the Full Length Play Festival and TheareFest. They too had 6 teams enter but there was no script advisor or set genre. Nor was time given for technical assistance or a dress rehearsal.

Assessor Lindsey Rusling had chosen a large nun hand puppet, an old dentist’s drill and a “Zoingy-Boingy” as props and the lines she chose were in the nature of five quite long ‘excerpts’. Lindsey and the audience were all impressed by the caliber of the 4 - 10 minute story lines. The District provided supper for the crowd while Lindsey made the hard decisions. After a “full day of madcap drama creation” Drama Christi’s team “It was the Croutons” celebrates, as pictured.

## How Havelock Theatre Faced up to Covid-19 by Peter Meikle (edited)

Havelock is a coastal township in the Pelorus Sounds at the top of the South Island. It's fondly known as the Greenshell Mussel Capital of the World and it's also known as the childhood home of two internationally important scientists, Ernest Rutherford and William Pickering.

This is the story of how one small amateur theatre group (established in 1999) faced the lockdown challenge and seems to testify to the resolute tenacity of so many people who cherish and value the performing arts as a significant part of social and society culture in a small community.

When the planned September 2020 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had to be cancelled the small struggling theatre faced the very common question of 'where to next?'

Like so many amateur theatres Havelock Theatre shares the problems of an aging audience base, shortage of technical personnel, difficulties in casting a play, designers, wardrobe, directors, marketing a production to the public and even forming a committee each year.

We decided to embrace technology and plan for January 2021 with a production of *A Bunch of Amateurs* by Andy Cadiff. The play in itself is a charming and beguiling homage to the vicissitudes of Amateur Theatre and a fitting tribute to the resolute tenacity that so many theatres deal with every day. It includes a play within a play as the enthusiastic amateur actors face the challenges of staging *King Lear* - it's a fabulous play of redemption.

We hoped that by going ahead with our 2021 programme we admitted that there had to be light in the pandemic tunnel - so the obvious option was to look at the various digital platforms available and Zoom was the obvious choice for us. It allows for multiple users and for a small fee, unlimited time as often as required and so here we are - 4 months into online rehearsing and a play is being created that given a fair wind will set sail in January 2021 for a live audience to share and enjoy.

We had auditions, first read through and are now into a fairly solid rehearsal period. Interestingly it highlighted several things we mostly know about this business.

Some people are blessed with a skill of being able to sight read and some people struggle. So cast members have had to confront these issues.



Unfortunately, online rehearsal confronts the actor to have to read into a microphone and some have really had to work very hard and some have found it easy. Director Peter Meikle is top left.

Our Monday night sessions on Zoom have for me become very important. Firstly there is immediacy of it. Currently the cast and production team are spread out through Blenheim, Havelock, and The Rai Valley. Every week we are in our selected location and we share the common objective - 'the play's the thing'. It has created a significant bond so that from our lounges, kitchens, man caves, bedrooms, book lined libraries, offices and sewing rooms we join as one united in a common goal. There is laughter and concentration.

Sometimes connection speeds waver and so there are frozen gaping mouths, lost links and slight delays in reactions and cues but by and large it allows us to continue in fellowship to reach the endgame. Our theatre in Havelock is moving forward and we are able to work towards the day when we start 'live rehearsals' as against 'Zoom rehearsals' - two new phrases in the theatre lexicon. There have been one on one discussions with most of the backstage team including wardrobe, set and props, lighting and sound.

Later this month (September) we will start the live rehearsals (level 2 currently). I decided that to kick these off we would have a workshop weekend. We have gone through the business of reading the play and gaining familiarity with the script, we have read each scene thoroughly 4 times so far. As the cast read, I have explained the business that happens and described as much of the key action as I was able. So our workshop will start off with blocking live. No struggling read-throughs (done), no introductions to characters (done), no endless chat about relationships (done), the "who am I and what am I bringing to the scene?" (done), the effort action of characters (done), the painful process of line learning from scratch already started.

The workshop is designed to physically bring everyone together for the first time and be together. It is concentrated on blocking the play in a focussed and designated environment and to connect all the dots that have been online and floating to this point. We will include a potluck dinner on day one - all cast, crew, theatre members and partners are invited as a way of acknowledging our post COVID19 phoenix and that we are still together, united and strong. Social, interactive and with a common thread in live theatre.

Every aspect of the online process has been a benefit and it has allowed us to be in touch, communicate and sustain our small theatre in a way none of us thought possible back in March 2020. I sincerely believe that it has really brought us together as a community of theatre practitioners.

I canvassed the cast for their feedback and have included some of their comments. (abbreviated for space - Ed.) I include the age range just so you can see the impact of this process over the various generations.

From Jessie Gatjens (16 - 20) *Online rehearsals have saved me from having to leave the house, this also meant my parents didn't have to drive me to the rehearsals.*

From Gillian Edwards (65+) *Patience is needed to be able to enjoy the benefits that technology can bring. Without Zoom, we could not have rehearsed.. It's that simple.*

From Kim Weatherhead (40+) *Never thought I would rehearse a production via Zoom, but here we are - Killing it!!!*

From Gil Smith (65+) *I have found Zoom brilliant for early days rehearsing as I wouldn't have been able to commit to the play if I'd had to add roughly 2 hours to the evening with travel plus preparation....*

From Shalom Del'Monte-Aberhart (40+) *In the words of the Bard himself: "Come, sit down, every mother's son, and rehearse your parts".*

From Ian Cameron (65+) *rehearsals start on time. There's a more intimate interaction with the director.*



Here is a sampler of the wide selection of plays we have on offer at Playmarket. Become a subscriber at [playmarket.org.nz](http://playmarket.org.nz) (\$40/year) to access as many manuscript titles as you like.

#### **Brand New Dramas**

**THE CAPE (FEMALE VERSION) by Vivienne Plumb** (4w) The year is 1994. Kurt Cobain is dead but Ebbie, Martha, Roo and Janice are seventeen years old, on the road and very much alive. They are making a journey north to the leaping place of the spirits – Cape Reinga. A story about that moment in every young person's life when they leave the child behind and are forced to accept adulthood.

**RUPTURE by Craig Thaine** (1w, 3m)  
 It's 1981 and the Springbok Tour is tearing the country apart. Greg protests against the tour with his friends Al and Otto. He's falling in love with Al, and falling out with his father, who thinks sport and politics don't mix. Greg struggles to manage competing demands and loyalties.  
*Shortlisted for the 2020 Adam NZ Play Award.*

#### **Shakespeare Refreshed!**

**ORCLAND by Susan Battye** (7w, 5m, 8 any)  
 A satirical adaptation of King Lear, now about 'Queen' Leah, a West Auckland (Orcland) wine estate owner, who divides her estate between her two self-serving daughters and cuts her self-sacrificing daughter out of her inheritance.

**THIS LONG WINTER by Sarah Delahunty** (10w, 12m, 1 any) Shakespeare's women have had it rough. It's time for a change. Thought to be dead, A Winter's Tale's Hermione has escaped from jail and is searching for her lost daughter. On the road she meets fierce wāhine toa dealing with their dumb narratives. It's time to start rewriting these women's stories from a new perspective.

**McDowell and Jason Te Kare** (1w, 1m)  
 Shakespeare has power. Miss Lucy knows it. She believes in the Bard's stories, because

they've helped her understand her own and she thinks they'll help others find their way too. When she brings her classes to a men's correctional facility, unexpected talents are revealed and twisted fantasies surface.

#### **Short and Sweet**

**PET by Claire Ahuriri-Dunning** (1w, 1m, 1 any)

Nance and Joe are unhappily married. The cat's not happy watching the same merry-go-round of emotions every day. Perhaps when the cat finally speaks up, things might change. A ten-minute play.

#### **QUEEN B by Pip Hall** (4w)

In the future, environmental changes have led to low fertility. Reproduction is managed by the state. One woman must do the breeding of many in return for money, status and power. A selection process is conducted by a technician: three women undergo testing to determine their suitability for "queen b" status.

#### **WATER, PLEASE by Nathan Joe** (2w, 1m)

A funny and effective ten-minute satire about two teenage girls ignoring a man dying of thirst.

#### **TRIPLE HELPING by Rex McGregor** (2w, 2m)

The misadventures of a social worker told in a sequence of 3 short comedies. In **Help Found**, a social worker wants to provide accommodation for a homeless man, but he loves his freedom. In **Help Full**, a young baker desperately wants to be famous. He doesn't care how. In **Help Less**, a team leader tries to cope with an overzealous social worker.

#### **WAITING FOR GO by Elspeth Tilley** (2 any)

A ten-minute climate action comedy, in tongue-in-cheek homage to Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot'. Two road workers stop traffic while they reflect on our fast pace of life and its effects on the planet.

#### **Hot Out of the Kitchen**

#### **HUDSON & HALLS LIVE! by Kip Chapman with Todd Emerson and Sophie Roberts**

(1w, 2m, 1 any) In the closet with the door wide open, Peter Hudson and David Halls were New Zealand's original great gay love story – and two of our greatest entertainers. Prepare to be transported to a 1980s television studio for big laughs, rum-fuelled showdowns, and some very questionable cooking.

## What's On in October and November 2020

Dargaville Little Theatre	<i>Prepare to Meet Thy Tomb</i> by Norman Robbins	Oct 3 - 9
	<i>Red and the Kuri</i> by Deborah Steele	Nov 26 - 29
Howick Little Theatre	<i>Dead Simple</i> by Peter James adpt(NZ Premiere)	to October 3
	<i>Swallow the Fly</i> by Rory Janssen (Studio)	Oct 21 - 24
	<i>A Christmas Carol</i> by Michael Paller	Nov 21 - Dec 12
Katikati Theatre	<i>The Orange Cone Road</i> by Logan/Young/ Thomas	Nov 25 - 29
16 <sup>th</sup> Ave Theatre, Tauranga	<i>Last Legs</i> by Roger Hall	Nov 20 - Dec 6
Detour Theatre, Tauranga	<i>Mad Sisters</i> by Devon Williamson	Nov 12 - 28
Putaruru Theatre	<i>The Dastardly Doctor Devereaux</i> by Billy St John	Oct 8 - 17
Centre Stage Taupo	<i>Last Legs</i> by Roger Hall	Nov 4 - 14
Gisborne Unity Theatre	<i>The Crucible</i> by Arthur Miller	Oct 2 - 10
Napier Repertory Players	<i>The Pink Hammer</i> by Michele Amas	Nov 11- 21
Cue Theatre, Inglewood	<i>Like a Virgin</i> by Gordon Steele	Oct 14 - 24
Hawera Repertory Soc.	<i>God of Carnage</i> by Yasima Reza	Oct 30 - Nov 7
Feilding Little Theatre	<i>Family Trust</i> by Richard Prevett	Nov 20 - Dec 5
Foxton Little Theatre	<i>The Jailhouse Frocks</i> by Devon Williamson	Nov 20 - Dec 5
Levin Little Theatre	<i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs</i>	
	by James Barry	Nov 20 - Dec 5
Mana Little Theatre	<i>Black Adder the Third</i> by Ben Elton	Nov 18 - Dec 5
Porirua Little Theatre	<i>The Sound of Music</i> Rogers & Hammerstein	Oct 29 - Nov 14
Khandallah Arts Theatre	<i>Of Mice and Men</i> by John Steinbeck	Nov 12 - 21
Stagecraft Theatre	<i>Ophelia Thinks Harder</i>	
	by Jean Betts & Shakespeare	Oct 28 - Nov 7
	AUDITION <i>That Bloody Woman</i> by Luke Di Somma & Gregory	
	Cooper A rock musical	Oct 10/11
Wellington Repertory	<i>Ladies in Black</i> by Carolyn Burns	Nov 18 - 28
Hutt Repertory	<i>Waiting for God</i> by Michael Aitkens	Nov 25 - Dec 5
Heretaunga Players	<i>Social Climbers</i> by Roger Hall	Nov 5 - 14
Riccarton Players	<i>Aladdin Disney JR</i>	Oct 1 - 10
Canterbury Repertory Theatre	<i>Present Laughter</i> by Noel Coward	Nov 18 - 28
SC Drama League, Timaru		
	<i>Giants in the Sky</i> Juniors Denver Casado/Kerry Kazmierowicztrimm	to Oct 3
	AUDITION <i>Heathers</i> , the Musical by Laurence O'keefe & Kevin Murphy	Nov 28
Invercargill Repertory Theatre	<i>Last Legs</i> by Roger Hall	Oct 13 - 17

Send information about productions and activities to [info@theatrenewzealand.co.nz](mailto:info@theatrenewzealand.co.nz)

### Request from the Lyric Theatre in Granity, West Coast

"A tornado blew off our theatre's roof. We have been rebuilding and refurbishing and will soon be needing curtains for the stage legs, stage lighting, sound equipment, and so on. Are there any theatres that have suitable things that are surplus to their requirements? "

Please get in touch with Tony Steiner [tonysteiner1948@gmail.com](mailto:tonysteiner1948@gmail.com) or 03 782 8172

Editor Margaret Robertson, Technical Assistance Morris Robertson  
Deadline for December/January Backchat 20 November  
PO Box 22 249 Wellington 6441