



newsletter

no. 15 april 2006

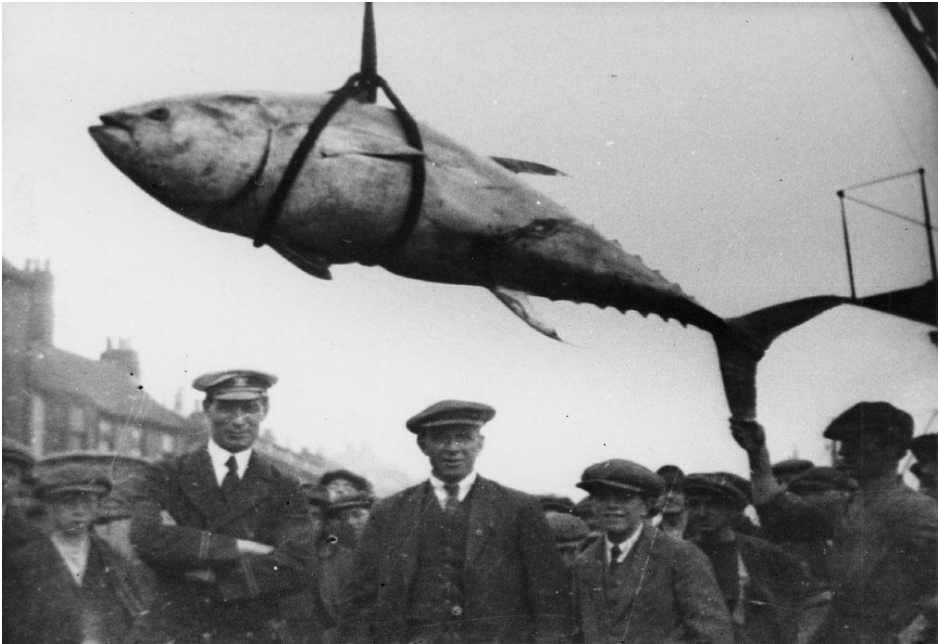
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GONE FISHING! **ACTORS WANTED!**

Like to share a stage with the piscatorial prince of tides pictured *left*? Yes, the chips are down for our production of Tom Hadaway's *Billy Wilson - Big Fish*; now director Jackie Fielding's looking to reel in three actors for this salty saga of old North Shields. We're fishing for a big-built, middle aged Geordie as the eponymous Billy, plus a middle aged Geordie lass to play the cleaner his ghost visits, and a man, 30+, to play a pastor.

Fit the bill? Actors, contact Peter Mortimer (see below) for audition on 5th June. Everyone, see page 2 for more details of performances and our special fish nights with The Keelers!



WHAT A CATCH!

Last minute news as we go to press!

Cloud Nine are celebrating after Arts Council England North East agreed to fund us to the tune of £33,951, our biggest ever single grant. This wonderful news means we can go ahead with all our planned programme, including a new brochure.

- *Billy Wilson* is fully funded (see above opposite and page 2).
- *Double Act* will go ahead at York Theatre Royal, and Tyneside. **Actors, look out for audition dates!**
- Two *Play Days* will take place (see opposite).
- The *Sixties Play* has £10,000; we still await news of £10,000 from The Foundation for Sport & Arts, and £4,070 from Awards for All, but we'd like to steam ahead with this one, so **if anyone over 60 wants to get on board, contact Peter Mortimer right away.** Let's get this show on the road!

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE ON
www.cloudninetheatre.co.uk

Writers! Got a play script you'd like to see workshopped by professional actors & director, to be performed script-in-hand to the public in our next *Play Day*? Contact Peter Mortimer for details! Also, see page 4 for another opportunity!

*Any news, info, ideas for newsletter? Contact editor, Valerie Laws, on 01912521816/valaws@yahoo.co.uk.
For bookings, auditions or to be put on our mailing list, contact Peter Mortimer at CLOUD NINE, 5 Marden Tce, Cullercoats, North Shields NE30 4PD or phone on 0191 2531901/email seaboy@freenetname.co.uk.*

COMEDY BITES THE DUST - EDITORIAL.

In the last issue of this newsletter, I enthusiastically flagged up the fifth tour of our annual all-new comedy sketch show, *Comedy Bites*. We'd planned to mark a move into the future by re-naming it *The Laughter Factory*. Now I have to report that the show is not going to happen, at least in that traditional format. After a lively writing workshop in January, we had twelve sketches incorporating ideas from Peter Mortimer, myself, Neil Armstrong, Kitty Fitzgerald, Norman McFadyen, Sarah Millican, and Paul Buie. We started ringing venues, and advertised for actors from the Cloud Nine stable, many of them *Comedy Bites* regulars. Answer came there (almost) none. As ever when something ends, it's both sad and salutary. *Comedy Bites* belonged at the heart of the original Cloud Nine, semi-professional, profit-sharing, with actors paid £20 per night, giving up their time for a long tour and long weeks of evening rehearsals. The cancellation of *Comedy Bites* shows how we've moved on. Since *Off the Wall*, we've mainly done fully professional, equity-rate funded plays. We're doing the *60's Play* to renew our support of community theatre too. When the Arts Council was reluctant to fully fund a comedy sketch show, generous sponsors such as Colette Stroud Solicitors, Magnesia Bank, and Eastcoast Taxis stepped in. But now professional actors, and directors, are understandably unwilling to commit that much time for semi-professional rates when it might mean losing other work. Actors with day jobs can't do 9-5 rehearsals. So an era ends, sadly. But we look forward: this is a measure of how far we've come, and we still have a dozen cracking sketches (see below) and we WILL use them in some format or other, when we find the right one. Onward and upward!

Valerie Laws



BILLY WILSON - BIG FISH

Catch our next play, by Tom Hadaway! You'll be hooked!

MONDAY 10th - FRIDAY 14th
JULY, FREE!! DAYTIME
PERFORMANCES at North
Shields Library.

OR COME TO A 'FISH NIGHT'
WED 12th & THURS 13th JULY
at Magnesia Bank Pub, North
Shields. See *Billy Wilson*, enjoy a
great fish dinner, and listen to sea
shanties from THE KEELERS!

Contact Peter Mortimer for how to book
tickets or see next newsletter for more info.

HAVING A GOOD LAUGH

What better way to spend an evening? Especially with good food and wine and good mates. But when some of Cloud Nine's finest convened at Kitty Fitzgerald's elegant Tynemouth flat on 24th March, it wasn't just to admire her mouldings and lubricate our funny muscles. Well, not entirely.

The sketches resulting from our writer's workshop (*see editorial, left*), eleven by Peter Mortimer and one by Valerie Laws, left high and dry by the Laughter Factory Tour cancellation, deserved an outing as well. So actors Daniel Carver, Susie Burton, and Ann Ridley (*see picture, left*) with Dylan Mortimer, David Courtnadge, Bill E Meeks, Carole Courtnadge, Jane Gallagher, Diane Legg and Harry Herring, performed them script-in-hand to Steering Group members. The results strengthened our resolve to find another home for the sketches, and gave us a great time to boot. Thanks to Kitty for her hospitality and a lovely spread.

ON CLOUD TEN?! A DECADE OF GREAT DRAMA!

Next year, 2007, sees the tenth anniversary of Cloud Nine. It's been quite a ride, without benefit of sat-nav or even a map. Steep learning curve? Vertical, more like, with some turbulence on the way, as dramatic triumphs boosted us to new heights, and funding crises plunged us to new depths. From early community productions, to semi-professional, to fully professional, with an expanding base of actors, writers, directors, and other personnel, not to mention venues, we feel we've got something to celebrate as we look to a new decade. First of all, we're planning a massive gala night in June 2007 at Whitley Bay Playhouse, featuring edited highlights of our past plays, where possible with the original cast members.

SO IF YOU'VE BEEN ONE OF OUR ACTORS, AND WANT TO BE IN ON THE BIG ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION, STEP UP AND LET US KNOW!

But that's not all. From now on, every issue of this newsletter will feature a guest writer's account of their chosen production. First up, fittingly, is Cloud Nine supremo, artistic director Peter Mortimer, who looks back at the very beginning when Cloud Nine was born, and no-one foresaw how it would grow. **SEE RIGHT...**

And **below**, a grainy old newspaper picture of the cast of *The Trip*, from the News Guardian, 1998. Recognise anyone?



A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE...

By Peter Mortimer

Cloud Nine was born one wintry night in 1997 close to my home, in a back room of Cullercoats Community Centre. I'd wanted to do some drama at the centre, and together we put in for some lottery money to enable the creation of an entire new play using local people. Half a dozen curious folk responded to the publicity and turned up for the first meeting, though numbers quickly swelled as the weeks progressed. There were bricklayers, accountants, students, the unemployed - many of them totally inexperienced in theatre. The idea was that from these weekly workshop sessions a play would slowly (miraculously?) emerge. Then we'd put it on. Simple, eh? Each week I'd take away the ideas created and put them into dramatic form. At the start, no-one had a clue what the play would be about.

Three months later with the draft of a play called *The Trip*, (a plotline somewhere between *Pilgrims Progress* and *The Magical Mystery Tour*) almost 50 people were involved. Some wanted to act, some to work backstage, some had been content merely to help create the play. Performance week was booked for April, 1998, and we went into rehearsals. The centre wanted the company to be known as Cullercoats Community Centre Amateur Dramatic Association. Imagine that. It ended up as Cloud Nine. To stage the play we totally transformed the Centre (some members were not amused). We brought in raked seating for 140 people, built a thrust stage, hung a 40ft by 40ft black canopy adorned with white stars to 'lower' the ceiling, and improve the dodgy acoustics. We erected a whole series of 15ft high black flats, and gave the place 100 per cent black-out. We leafleted Cullercoats. Two days before opening one leading actor Christine Henry broke her leg (literally), and Barbara Burgess had to step in at short notice. Night one attracted a respectable 58 people. Nights 2-5, it was sold out.

The News Guardian called it 'magnificent'. And interest was such that later that year we restaged it at the much bigger Whitley Bay Playhouse with an almost identical cast (though with Christine Henry back on two legs). Cloud Nine was up and running, and has been running ever since. Much has changed, but it's interesting that our planned Sixties play will be organised and created on the exact principles that we used for *The Trip* all that time ago.

A WARK ON THE WILD SIDE...

BATTLESTEADS HOTEL, *pictured below*, IN THE PICTURESQUE NORTHUMBRIAN VILLAGE OF WARK, SOON TO BE THE SCENE OF A CLOUD NINE INVASION - JOIN US! See right for details.



FUNNY FOR FIVE MINUTES?

Writers wanted!

Continuing our partnership with the magnificent Magnesia Bank at North Shields, we're planning a night of comedy in the bar there. If you can write five-minute monologues, to be performed by actors, which will have revellers reeling, contact Peter Mortimer (see page 1).

GALA OPENING OF HADAWAY THEATRE

The performance studio at Tyne Metropolitan College was officially opened on March 16th as The Tom Hadaway Theatre, under the directorship of Colin Sharp. Extracts of Tom's work were performed by students, to Tom's family and guests, including Peter Mortimer of Cloud Nine, who has been asked to join the Board together with Charlie Hardwick and Barbara and Pauline Hadaway. We hope to work with Colin and Tynemet in the future, and wish them well.

THANK YOU, CAROLE COURTNADGE

for years of hard work for Cloud Nine. Carole has stepped down from the Steering Group due to other commitments, as well as the Chair as reported in issue 14. Happily she remains a Director of the Company. Carole has also pointed out that she and David Courtnadge were actually the first couple to meet through Cloud Nine, so sorry Carole for getting that wrong in the last issue!

BATTLESTEADS OR BUSSED!

We're planning a **coach trip to Wark** to visit **Battlesteads Hotel & Restaurant on 4th May** - why not join us? Enjoy the beauty of the countryside, a night out at a first-class hostelry, and no squabbles about designated drivers. Battlesteads Hotel is the latest venture of Richard and Dee Slade. The long-time owners of North Shields' Magnesia Bank, faithful friend, sponsor, watering hole of choice and sometimes employer of Cloud Nine, have left the Maggie in daughter Kate's safe hands and gone upcountry. So for a mere **£3 per person, we'll pick you up at Whitley Bay Metro, 6.45, or Central Station, Newcastle, at 7.15, whisk you off for a grand night out, plus dinner if you book in advance, and then bring back what's left of you to Newcastle, 11.00, or Whitley Metro, 11.30, in time for last metros. Cloud Nine is subsidising the trip, so bring a partner or mate, & book in advance by contacting Meriel Johnston, meriel@mljohnston.freeserve.co.uk or 0191 2514022.**

CLOUD NINE CLIPPINGS -

Sean O'Brien's version of *The Birds*, Aristophanes' comedy of Cloud Cuckoo Land is at Lit & Phil, Newcastle, 7-8 April with **Daniel Carver** and **Jackie Philips**.

Susie Burton is to star in *Byker Grove* opposite **Neil Armstrong**, as a flirty fashion student - Susie, not wor Neil!

Kitty Fitzgerald won 2nd prize in the prestigious Barnes & Noble Award for her novel *Pigtopia*. She was presented with the prize in a glittering event in New York. Congratulations, Kitty!

Harry Herring hits Bollywood? Watch this space!