

# newsletter

no. 23, april 2008

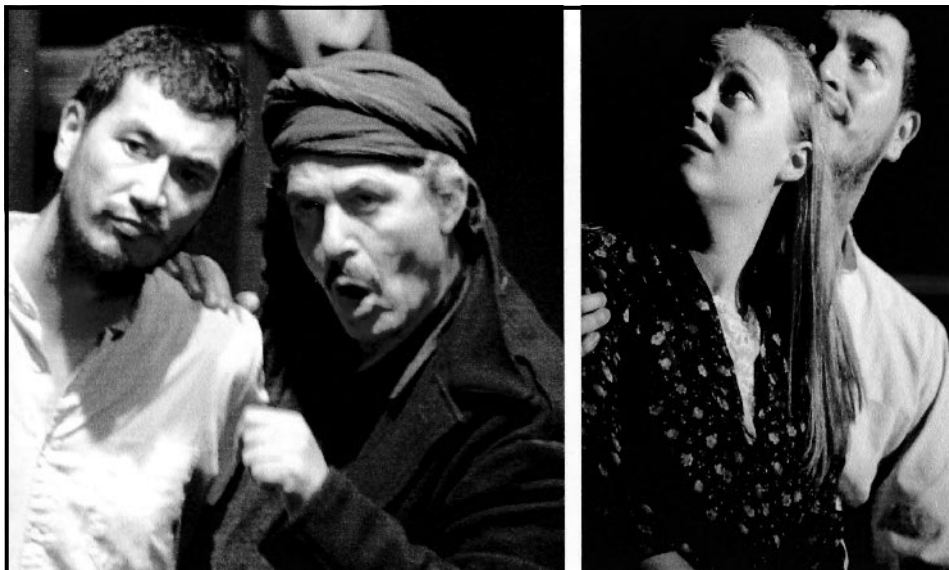
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## RIOT DATES & VENUES

11-14 June + Sat mat,  
Customs House, South  
Shields. 0191 4541234

18-19th July, Unity  
Theatre, Liverpool. 0151  
7094988.



## THE RIOT ACT!

Peter Mortimer's play **RIOT** is to be revived at Customs House South Shields, this time as a Cloud Nine production, going on to Unity Theatre, Liverpool as part of the Arab Arts Festival. Still with Darren Palmer at the helm, but with a new cast, the play will provoke, entertain, and inform, as it brings the historic South Shields race riots to a modern audience well aware of tensions that can arise between cultures and religions, as well as the relationships that can develop across divides. The Yemeni seamen who settled in South Shields were both part of and outside the community, and **RIOT** examines a time when tensions erupted into violence. Peter spent some time in Yemen researching the play, meeting descendants of the Shields Yemenis in remote villages. *See top right for performance details, and check our website for audition/casting news. (Above, Leonard Estranero (left & far right), Neji Nejah & Janine Leigh in previous production at Customs House. Photos: Steve Chettle, ARTS UK.)*

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE ON  
[www.cloudninetheatre.co.uk](http://www.cloudninetheatre.co.uk)

## THE SELKIE reviewed.

'Valerie Laws' intense tale ...is part kitchen sink drama and part sea fable, mixed with tragedy, humour and haunting live music. [Angela] Szalay is totally believable as a woman veering wildly between love and resentment for her family. There are some great performances in this play but Szalay is just compelling as Roanne struggles to find answers to her turmoil and answer the mournful selkie's call. And how does a sea selkie sound? It sounds like Katie Doherty, a rising young talent with a beautiful, lilting voice which ebbs and flows like the tide, while those fishermen - really sea shanty group The Keelers who have written music to Laws' lyrics - add rich vocal depth.' **Barbara Hodgson, The Journal.** (More on page 2.)

Any news, info, ideas for newsletter? Contact editor, Valerie Laws, on 01912521816/[valaws@yahoo.co.uk](mailto: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 [ironpress@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:ironpress@blueyonder.co.uk)

## SEALED WITH A KISS - *THE SELKIE* TOUR REVIEWED!

Cloud Nine's tour of Valerie Laws' play *The Selkie* took place in February. First, an exciting opening weekend, 7th-9th, at Sage Gateshead, brought a well-filled Hall 2, and a powerful audience response, laughter and tears, and powerful sympathy for main character Roanne. Cloud Nine's first time at the Sage, the opening night was made even more special, as our generous sponsor Colette, of Colette Stroud Family Solicitors, threw a big pre-show reception for friends, clients, press and Cloud Nine people. Some problems with hearing dialogue from the very top tier seats meant keeping them off limits, the only problem in using a music venue for drama. After the Sage, *The Selkie* toured the northern region, playing Whitby, York, Berwick, Dipton, Washington, Alnwick, Hexham, Bishop Auckland, and ended with two almost full house nights at Saville Exchange, North Shields. A very successful tour, with good audiences, especially for winter nights with a new play, the only dip being Dipton, which was 'quiet'. Whitby was a highlight, with waves pounding the cliff the Pavilion Theatre clings to, rivalling the sea sound effects. Hexham featured a sudden stage black out, turned into triumph by the inspired ad-libbing of Tony Neilson ('bloody lights fused again!') and Angela, who were applauded when the lights came on! Ruth Raynor's stage design of prom, pier and space between, allowed free reign for action and audience imagination, though the cast had to be flexible in York, where a full house audience in a small space crowded round a drastically reduced set and were nearly impaled on the Keelers' fishing rods. Much product placement of hobnobs was involved - we should have had sponsorship from McVities!

Press reviews were favourable. The *Journal* review is on page 1, and some extracts from others follow:

'...homegrown drama at its best...Emotions mix well with drama, pathos and humour, and some beautiful music to make this a drama certainly worth netting.'

Linda Douglas, *Evening Chronicle*.



Have a hobnob! Above, Roanne (Angela Szalay) takes the biscuit from her Dad (Jack McBride) in *The Selkie*.

'... hugely entertaining "play with songs" ... Valerie Laws has updated the fishermen's folk story to modern day Whitley Bay and written a clever and highly enjoyable tale ... South Shields actress Angela Szalay plays the downtrodden mother (Roanne). She's terrific, a joy to watch as she deals with her philandering husband (Tony Neilson), clinging father (Jack McBride), a so-called friend (Sonia Beinroth) and selfish daughter (Christina Berriman Dawson). Amid the pathos and laughter (imagine telling your family you're a Selkie), Roanne is called to the sea by the Selkie (Katie Doherty) whose traditional ballad-style voice is stunning. The four-piece Keelers add further seafaring atmosphere to the proceedings with their sea-shanty harmonies. There are some nice twists and turns in the storyline and Neil Armstrong's direction with a minimalist set ensures the piece zips along.' Ed Waugh, *Northern Echo*.

'I watched Valerie Laws' play, enchanted by this story, amused by its mix of northern charm and wit and was blown away by the live performances of The Keelers and Katie Doherty, who were embodied as members of the cast. Katie's voice was startling and everyone was spell-bound by the sailor's sea music. The lyrics made the play magical and the myth believable and this was a beautifully sound-tracked, modern take on an old myth.' Hayley Forbes, *The Crack*.

All in all, it was quite an experience for all concerned!

**THE SELKIE - A VIEW FROM THE BAND. The Keelers are this issue's guest columnists. So, how was it for you, lads?**

'This was a new experience for The Keelers. We've done musical themes before like *John Barleycorn*, *The Transports* and *Nelson-the Fiery Admiral*, working with musicians and orchestration, but not in a stage play with professional theatre people, where even more could go wrong. I think we weren't prepared for things to change so much during rehearsals and even during the tour. To start with we thought we were writing songs but it turned out that we were putting tunes to Valerie's poems. Then we expected to be singing complete songs but found we had to do them in bits, which meant hitting the right start note several times instead of just once as we're used to doing. Also, we thought we'd have more to do and were somewhat dismayed by how much got cut out of the little we had. Folk audiences are quite used to taking in the words of quite long songs and ballads but apparently theatre audiences are not. Then, finally, Pete Wood found out he had to do lots of link pieces on the concertina with only days to go before we hit the stage. So, there's all our anxieties laid down, so how did it go? Well, like the productions we've done before, it all came together as if by magic, I mean the acting, music and direction. Once we had our bits sorted we found we didn't have nearly as much to remember as the actors (especially Angie who was in every scene) and the songs started to make sense once we saw how the narrative of the play worked out. We were tense going into the first performance, having made a few mistakes in the dress rehearsals, but we needn't have worried as it was a corporate event so the large audience were quite full of free wine by the time it started and they laughed at every line. We found ourselves looking forward to each new performance more and more, especially when the tour started, and we had great times in really lovely theatres like Whitby, York, Alnwick, Berwick etc. It was quite deflating at the last show at The Saville Exchange to know that this creature (the Selkie) would no longer be part of our lives after so many weeks of work. On a different note, we only found out at the end of the tour that our habit of having a backstage beer

before the performance, another during the interval and several at the end, took the others (actors, director, producer etc) by surprise. Folk music is invariably accompanied by copious quantities of the 'nectar ambrosia' but apparently this is not the done thing in theatrical circles.

Ah well – we'll know better next time! And we all hope there will be a next time.

Thanks for the memories!'

**And thank you Keelers, you were terrific!**

*Below, The Keelers on stage/pier, in The Selkie.*



**SILVER SCREEN SIXTIES!**

The Sixties Group have been approached by North Tyneside Disability Forum Tinnitus Experience Project, to provide actors for a short film based on sufferers' accounts. Dot Elliot and David Wood will be stepping up, and this time, with Awards for All funding, as professional actors! The Sixties Group are meeting weekly for writing workshop sessions with writer Kitty Fitzgerald for their new Cloud Nine play involving bingo, working men's clubs and drag acts... watch this space for more details. Director Anne Orwin has been attending workshops too.



Above, *Selkie* stage designer Ruth Raynor's other 'production', baby Isla Fen, born on 7th January. Said Ruth, 'I'll never forget Neil shouting to Dylan to turn off that b.... sound effect, when the offending noise was Isla screaming blue murder!'

### NEW WRITING OPPORTUNITY! *PLAYDAY RETURNS*

Another new venue for our regular PlayDay venture has been arranged. Town Hall, Bishop Auckland, will host the evening script in hand performance of two 30-minute plays on Sunday, 23rd November, hopefully after a day's workshopping. The plays will be chosen from submissions, so get writing, and contact Peter Mortimer or check the website for details! Writers anywhere can submit scripts for consideration, deadline for submissions is 7th September.

### AWAYDAY TRIP

Cloud Nine's Steering Group had a full day's meeting in the scenic surroundings of Riverdale Hall Hotel in Bellingham, Northumberland. Ideas for the future of Cloud Nine were tossed about, or out, by fresh-air-fuelled group members. Amid the stream of schemes suggested, a strong feeling of intensifying our commitment to Linskill Centre, North Shields, as our base, predominated. We plan to consolidate our position there with the help of Dot Owston of Linskill, by applying for funding from The Big Lottery Fund, for proper office equipment, staffing, and even a phone! Watch this space for other ideas breaking through into the real world...we just keep 'em coming!

## WALLSEND FESTIVAL

Cloud Nine's contribution to Wallsend Festival is taking shape, though funding's not totally finalised. In yet another 'first', we are planning a 20 minute mime piece, which should at least save paper on scripts! The mime play will probably have a music accompaniment and will take place first of all on Saturday 5th July, as part of the festival, in an outdoor performance in the afternoon, and an evening show at Buddle Arts Centre in Station Road Wallsend. We will also involve Rosehill College Drama Students in one session. We hope to feature the wordless wonder at other local summer festivals, such as Mouth of the Tyne.

### CLOUD NINE CLIPPINGS

**Peter Mortimer:** Just published by IRON Press and North Tyneside Libraries and Museums, is ***Mortimer at Large***, Selected Columns from the News Guardian, by our artistic director Peter Mortimer. More than 140 columns span almost five years, and the book costs £8.00 from bookshops or direct on 0191-2531901.

**Neil Armstrong, Tony Neilson and Sonia Beinroth** are reprising their roles in the extended run of *Our Friends in the North* at Gala Theatre, Durham.

**Harry Herring** followed up his meaty role in *The Royal Today*, on Yorkshire TV, with a skit of it on *Harry Hill's TV Burp*. Also, he starred recently in *Maggie's End*, at Gala Theatre Durham.