



newsletter

no. 28 July 2009

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UNREAL @ The Customs House



Louis Roberts and Chris Connel in *MIND GAMES* by Joe McLaughlin

UNREAL, our trio of new plays by Alison Carr, Louise Gallagher and Joe McLaughlin, which recently ran at the Customs House, was the first production in our three year partnership with that centre. It was a critical success.

'All three plays have been workshopped by the company and given script-in-hand performances (with the same director, Jackie Fielding) over a two year period before they received this full production. It's a process which has paid off handsomely.'

- Shields Gazette

'There's such promise here we could easily be witnessing tomorrow's theatrical 'big hitters.'

- Shields Gazette

'These three plays – all directed by Jackie Fielding and featuring the same four actors – are engaging and witty. They tackle some really difficult subject matters with intelligence and sensitivity. Cloud Nine's partnership with The Customs House has unveiled some unreal talent.'

- Evening Chronicle

'Unreal, an impressive showcase of the region's talent, is characterised by thoughtful, concise scripts, strong performances and even entertaining scene changes.'

- The Journal



UNREAL cast from left; Louis Roberts, Christina Berriman Dawson, Chris Connel, Tracy Gillman

*page 2: Louise Gallagher on the development process

*page 3: Ray Spencer, director of the Customs House, on 'partnership'



BINGO!

- on the road again

Following its sell-out shows at North Shields Library in January, the comedy, **BINGO!**, performed by Cloud Nine's community wing, The Sixties Group, hits the boards again.

See it at Wallsend Library, before and during Wallsend Festival and at The Cullercoats Crescent Club.

This one act play was written by Kitty Fitzgerald, working with The Sixties Group and is directed by Anne Orwin.

It is set during one eventful night at a CIU club on Tyneside and includes a drag act, magic, line dancing and a game of bingo.

30TH JUNE - 4TH JULY

Wallsend Library

**12.30pm free entry
to book tel: 200 6968**

SUNDAY 5TH JULY

**Cullercoats Crescent Club,
show starts 8.15 pm**

**free entry
to book tel: 253 0242**

Any news, info, ideas or letters for the newsletter, and any bookings, audition queries or to be put on our mailing list, please contact: Kitty Fitzgerald at CLOUD NINE, 5 Marden Terrace, Cullercoats, Tyne & Wear NE30 4PD.

T: 0191 253 1901 E: ironpress@blueyonder.co.uk
our web address is: www.cloudninetheatre.co.uk

The Making of a Play

I was beginning to wonder about exhibiting my collection of rejection letters rather than try to have a novel published, when I noticed an advert in a Cumbria newsletter for a PlayDay as part of the 2007 Writers Festival in Hexham, writes LOUISE GALLAGHER.

You had to take part of a script, or an idea for a script to be 'workshopped'. Though a drama teacher I hadn't thought of writing a script, assuming there was much more demand for novels, but I'd recently overheard an interesting conversation on a train, and I reckoned there was character there worth developing, so I went along, curious, but not really expecting a great deal.

We started the day with sixteen, mostly strangers, around a large table. One by one we shared our ideas, gave and received feedback. What struck me about Peter Mortimer, the workshop leader, was how honest he was. He said when he did like something and he said when he didn't. The fact that he did the former made you more inclined to believe the latter. The atmosphere was very generous, and suggestions were made on how all of us could improve our plays. I'm sure that if I hadn't been in that room at that time, I wouldn't have written *Double Nuts*, I'd more likely have written a short story instead, or perhaps another unpublished novel. I had a go at improving my play, sent it off, and then, following the advice of all good writing manuals, promptly forgot



Christine Berriman Dawson and Louis Roberts in DOUBLE NUTS

about it. A few months later I received an e-mail from Peter. My play had been selected for a performance, 'script-in-hand', and he gave me some more suggestions on how to improve it; it involved cutting a scene that gave the audience too much information too soon. On 2 November 2007 I arrived at a community hall in Hexham to meet

Jackie Fielding and four professional actors. The team read the three scripts by turn, got them on their feet, and suggested yet more alternatives to the writers. I wasn't used to such hands on feedback. At times it was difficult – there were a lot of holes to be filled – but it was also illuminating. I got to see how my script actually worked, which I had never experienced with prose.

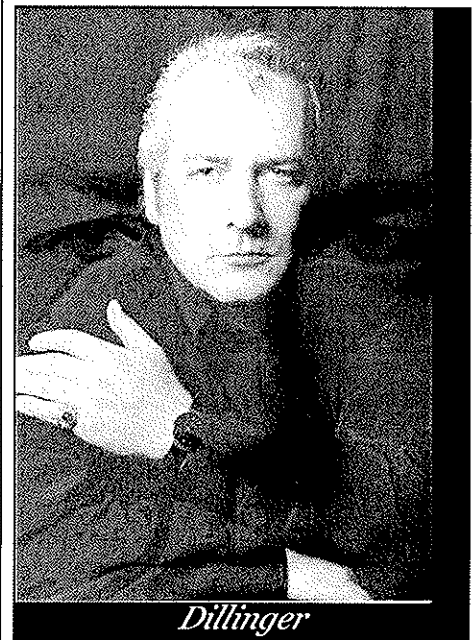
That evening, we made our way to a small upstairs room at the Queen's Hall and watched the magic unfold – and it really was magic. To see something I'd written transformed into something live on stage, and to witness the audience reaction was quite amazing. Later, Pete said to us that he might get funding to put the plays on properly one day and, in time honoured tradition I promptly took it with a big pinch of salt.

Six months later I was round a table in the Northern Stage Cafe with Pete, Jackie, Alison and Joe, discussing how we would stage the plays, *Cloud Nine* had secured the funding. Jackie reckoned the air of unreality was what the plays had in common, hence the title, UNREAL. A few rewrites and a lot of rehearsal later and they were ready to be staged at the Customs House.

This process has been like pressing the zoom button on a camera and getting further away from the object you're trying to photograph. As I've got further from my initial ideas, I've got closer to how an audience member might feel watching my play. I think that's been the same for all three of us. I once was inspired to write, by a conversation on a train - if I'd written a poem it would have turned out different; because it was an idea for a play all the rest was collaboration. Ideas were given freely at the workshop day; suggestions were made after the three plays were selected; more ideas were suggested at the 'script in hand', then finally, Jackie and the actors made it their own.

THE MIRTH THE MUSIC THE MAGIC

We now have the cast for our event taking place at *The Trojan Rooms* on Whitley Bay's South Parade. *Mirth Music and Magic*, the three part show features seven of our favourite comic sketches picked from previous touring comedy shows; music from the harmonising duo, *The Creels*, and pure magic from *Dillinger* the master magician.



Dillinger

The actors are Dylan Mortimer, Ann Ridley, Christina Dawson, Daniel Carver, Aaron Mirfin, and from Bellingham, Gary Cole, and from Heaton, Rosie Sales, the latter two making their *Cloud Nine* debut. *The Trojan Rooms*, the coast's newest performance venue, already features music and stand-ups, but this will be its first theatre event.

THE TROJAN ROOMS
SUN JULY 19TH AT 7.30PM
AN ASTOUNDINGLY CHEAP
EVENING AT ONLY £6.00 PER
TICKET, WHICH CAN BE
ORDERED IN ADVANCE FROM
THE VENUE
TEL: 0191 251 0080

Cloud Nine and I stumbled into each other and like many chance meetings it grew into a friendship.

We found we had much in common; same interests, knew the same people and even flirted around the notion of being more serious and long term, but we still did our own thing most of the time. Then, as is the way of these things, we were at the crossroads; do we commit or walk away wondering what might have been?

RAY SPENCER, director of *The Customs House*, on the partnership with *Cloud Nine*

We consummated our relationship with *UNREAL* and the earth moved for me when I saw what potential this and future babies have. We'll have an open marriage, as in the arts it pays to be promiscuous, but remain loyal to our partnership and stay together for the sake of the kids (plays). Enough of this analogy. I'm proud to be working with an organisation that overcomes the odds and gets things done. Much of this comes down to the sheer obstinacy of Peter Mortimer. His single minded



approach has achieved much and has eventually worn me down into finding funding. Over the next three years my target is to help new writers and writing emerge, employ regional actors, directors and designers, and give the people of the northeast a voice. We must also aim to have our plays seen by more people in more venues and produce that play which gives us national recognition. We then reinvest the profits to make more great theatre. This against a background of reduced funding is a big ask but we are still in the honeymoon period, so let's look to what could be and let's dream big.

God Only Knows.....

Writers Trevor Wood and Ed Waugh have made their name in recent years with such commercial blockbusters as *Dirty Dancing* and *Waiting for Gateaux*, though they moved into more political territory with their play based round Thatcher's funeral, *Maggie's End*.

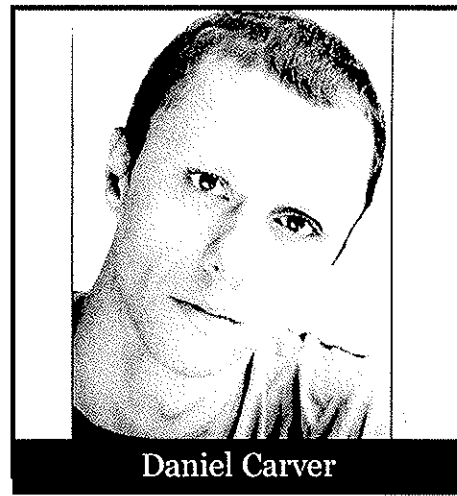
They're now engaged in a play for *Cloud Nine* which we anticipate will see them in new and exciting territory. Catch the first run-out of *God Only Knows* on **Sunday July 12** at The Customs House with Daniel Carver directing a cast of five in a script-in-hand reading.

The controversial play is based in a modern academy school run on creationist lines by a millionaire northern businessman.

Mark Wingett, Vicky Elliott, Christina Berriman Dawson, Sean Kenney and Louis Roberts are the cast for a play which we hope to take to full production and tour in 2010. The play will be workshopped during the day and the

performance is at 7.30. Tickets are only £3.00.

To reserve seats phone (0191) 454 1234.



Daniel Carver

Ten Scribblers on the Tyne

On the first step of what could lead for some to a full production, ten aspirant playwrights gathered with our artistic director Peter Mortimer for a full day's workshop at the *Customs House*, South Shields in June.

Each writer provided the opening pages of a planned 30 minute play, and over the course of the day each play was discussed, critiqued, and recommendations made for further rewrites. Subject matter was wide and varied, including a catastrophic flood where a man desperately seeks to save his pinball machine, a play where the audience decides the killer, a released murderer returning to his former prison visitor who he seduced, a piece acted out at computer terminals, and a child's

fascination with the secrets of a grandfather clock.

The writers now have until mid-August to finish the plays and submit them to our next *PlayDay* event to be held at the *Customs House* on **Sunday October 4**. Three plays will be chosen to be workshopped in the presence of the writers, then given a script-in-hand performance that evening before a live audience. The director will be Anne Orwin. Writers who did not attend the original workshops are also free to enter scripts. The deadline is **August 15**, plays to be no longer than 30 minutes to suit a cast of no more than four.

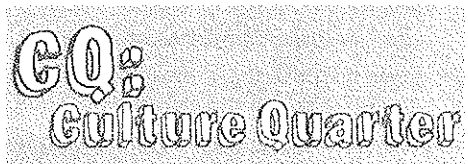
ALL THREE PLAYS IN OUR RECENT *UNREAL* PRODUCTION WENT THROUGH THE *PLAYDAY* PROCESS.

For more details contact: Peter Mortimer (details on page 1)

The Cultural Revolution at the Coast

Culture Quarter is a newly formed organisation at the coast dedicated to helping improve the area's creative activity. Cloud Nine has already been involved in various meetings with the not-for-profit group. Here a director of CQ, TOBY BRIDGES, writes about their aims and ambitions.

One of the main areas of focus is theatre and CQ is keen to see the development of drama in all its formats from opera to dance, from musicals to plays. A core belief in the organisation says that a successful and vital amateur and youth scene should drive a vibrant and, importantly, viable professional scene - that one cannot, or will struggle, to exist without the other feeding it. To this end CQ aims to provide support, through its CQ Collaborate brand for local groups to communicate and work together more frequently. CQ is already supporting *Whitley Bay Operatic Society* in their production of *Jekyll and Hyde* and has provided them, amongst other things, with box office, design & advertising support, treasury facilities and rehearsal space.

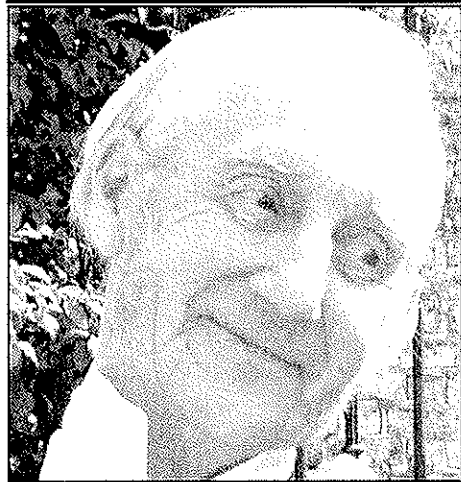


Longer term CQ hopes to provide more access to education in the dramatic arts, either by itself or in combination with providers already set up in the area, such as *Cloud Nine*. This is a key feature of their current bid for the Dome and the Empress Ballroom. Another aim is to improve the amount and flexibility of venue space available for drama, particularly for smaller or newly created works. CQ is currently self-funded and looking for people to sign up to membership to help it grow.

Volunteers are also welcome to join and help drive the organisation forward.
For information:
www.culturequarter.org or pop in and see us at CQ.HQ opposite the Playhouse, Whitley Bay.

WBOS' *Jekyll and Hyde* is on at the Park Hotel from the 29th June to the 4th July, tickets available from CQ.HQ on 0191 253 0466.

Farewell to Harry



Cloud Nine gave actor Harry Herring its own send-off at the Linskill Centre in May when an audience of fellow actors, family and friends gathered for a special event centered around Roger Burgess' film of Harry's life and career, *All The World's a Stage*.

Detailing a rich and varied life on stage and screen where Harry moved effortlessly between playing a Geordie lad and upper crust attorney, the film was an emotional affair for its audience, including Harry's daughter, Lorraine Ahmed, lots of non-dry eyes in the house as it were.

Actor Helen Russell recited her own humorous and affectionate poem about the veteran thespian. Here's an extract:

*Now Harry's up there way on high
If there's an audience in the sky
He'll take the Angels under his wing
And teach them to dance and sing*
And as a mark of respect the audience downed a good few bottles of wine.

BEST FOOT FORWARD

Many Cloud Nine members were included in the forty six writers, actors, directors and other friends and colleagues of Peter Mortimer who took part in a seven mile Shatila Ramble on Sunday 7th June.

Taking in the coastline and countryside in North Tyneside, the walkers raised over £5,500 towards bringing children from Shatila Refugee Camp, Lebanon, to perform on Tyneside this coming September at *The Sage, The Customs House, Saville Exchange* and *Bellingham Town Hall*. Peter lived on the camp for two months last year and now ten children and four teachers are coming over here.

The walk was dedicated to John Gourley of Edwards Rd, Whitley Bay, who, despite suffering from terminal cancer, planned to take part in the walk with his family. He died the same morning as the walk. Peter Mortimer said:
'John was a very positive, brave and generous man and we know how much he would have wanted the walk to be a success.'



ADVANCE NOTICE FOR PLAYWRIGHTS

Cloud Nine is running a writers' workshop at Bishop Auckland Town Hall on **Saturday 7th Nov**. Then next spring scripts will be selected for a *PlayDay* at the Town Hall. Anyone who lives in the Arts Council North East region can apply for the workshop and/or send a script for *PlayDay* consideration. (address on cover)