

# BACKCHAT

News from THEATRE NEW ZEALAND  
*Fostering Community Theatre in Aotearoa*

April/May 2020

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Hamilton Playbox (plating up since 1933) recently presented *The BFG* by Roald Dahl and made history for the shortest run of a play in the history of Playbox, opening and closing on the same night. This scene is of *The BFG* and Sophie in his cave sampling the frobscottle and letting off a whizzpopper. *The BFG* played by Graham Pollard, Sophie by Scarlett Edgar.

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

## Covid-19

Dear Members and all Theatre Practitioners aligned to Theatre New Zealand



These are troubling times. The very nature of who we are is being challenged. Productions around the country are being cancelled, both Professional and Community.

Concerts, sports games, meetings, forums, reunions, workshops, gone altogether or postponed indefinitely. Public and community life, as we know it, the very heart of theatre, curtailed. I feel our government has done the right thing in basically closing the borders and creating an ethic to slow and perhaps block this virus.

Our friends of *Musical Theatre NZ* cancelled their Annual General Meeting and Training Weekend in Napier this past month. This was also their 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration. Our sympathy and understanding goes out to them. Thank you to those TNZ members who have already reached out to us seeking protection measures, to keep your people safe.

**Is this an advantageous time for all of us to step back and check our Theatre Health & Safety Protocols?**

As I write to you there has been no 'community-based outbreak'. But the virus is slowly seeping into the very fabric of our society. Necessary precautions are in place around the country.

Large and middle-sized theatre groups have seen fit to curtail their activities for the autumn. Some smaller groups with similar sized productions in country areas are hanging in there.

**Keep safe. We are asking you all to follow the Ministry of Health guidelines.**



No doubt you are all wondering what is happening to our July and August *TheatreFest* rounds and in particular the *TheatreFest National Final* along with the *2020Vision* Celebrations in September at *The Court Theatre*, Christchurch.

With people needing to go into rehearsal late May, it is just too hard to assess the progress, dangers and volatility of Covid-19 ahead.

It is therefore with deep regret that *Theatre New Zealand* has decided to cancel *TheatreFest* for 2020 and also put our celebrations on hold. (News of the AGM at a later date). I am particularly cast-down as we were creating a great line-up of workshops and celebratory activities on top of the National Finals. The Christchurch team were all looking forward to hosting you here again, at last! Christchurch seems to lurch from situation to situation. What a decade!

If you are writing a new play, don't stop. If you were developing a devised piece, find a way to keep it going. If you have the rights to an exciting piece of challenging theatre, hold them!

**Maybe use this enforced time-out to strategise your group's way forward in the spring.**

We are here to help, with workshops and mentoring programmes. The year started well. Let's pick it up later and make even stronger, more creative, more stimulating theatre in the days ahead.

Let's also now make 2021, reincorporating all of the above, (but not the virus) a year to remember!

My regards to you all, keep safe. Nga mihi. Te Putoi Whakaari o Aotearoa

**Bryan Aitken**  
President

### Production Postponements

Dargaville LT ... *Meet Thy Tomb*  
Howick LT *Love of a Stanger*  
Te Aroha LT *Steel Magnolias*  
Hamilton Playbox *The BFG*  
16<sup>th</sup> Theatre *Last Legs*  
Detour Theatre *Mad Sisters*  
Putaruru Theatre *The Dastardly Doctor Devereaux*  
Rotorua LT *Caramba's revenge*  
Taumarunui PA *Vicar of Dibley*  
New Plymouth Rep *Rough Justice*  
Cue Theatre, Inglewood *Like a Virgin*  
Hawera Theatre *God of Carnage* and *Bugsy Malone Jnr*  
Feilding *Penalties, Pints & Pirouettes*  
Foxton Little Theatre *Things my Mother Taught Me*  
Levin LT. *The Vagina Monologues*  
Kapiti PH. *Desperate Huttwives*  
Mana Little Theatre *Death and Taxes*  
Porirua Little Theatre *Brassed Off*  
Wellington Rep *Ladies in Black*  
Hutt Rep *Waiting for God*  
Boathouse Theatre *Boeing, Boeing*  
Riccarton Players *Boys in the Band*  
South Cant. Drama League *Curtains Easy Money & Motherhood the Musical*  
Clyde Theatre *The Pink Hammer*  
Invercargill Rep *Last Legs*

### No Subs for 2020 - 2021 Year

David Cox National Treasurer writes TNZ's year runs from 1st April and under normal circumstances I would soon be inviting all member groups, schools and individuals to pay their annual subs of \$100, \$100 and \$40 respectively. The Executive recognises, though, that this is going to be an exceptionally difficult year for theatre throughout the country and has therefore resolved to waive subscriptions for the year.

There will be no charge to be a group, school or individual member of TNZ (and, for those groups, schools and individuals based in Wellington, of the Wellington District) for the year 1st April 2020 - 31st March 2021.

If anyone has any questions please do not hesitate to contact me

([treasurer@theatrenewzealand.co.nz](mailto:treasurer@theatrenewzealand.co.nz))

### Jennifer Ward-Lealand, New Zealander of the Year 2020



In February Jennifer, one of our Patrons, was made New Zealander of the Year. This prestigious award was for her commitment to the arts and advocacy of Te Reo. Heartiest congratulations were sent on behalf of TNZ members and we received a gracious reply

*Thank you all so very much. As you can imagine it has been quite a whirlwind since the announcement of the award and I've only just been able to find time to respond to the many well-wishers. I am not quite sure what this year is going to hold (wish me luck) but one thing is for sure, I shall continue to be a staunch advocate for the arts and the people within, and of course for te reo Māori :-)*

*I look forward to meeting you all sometime soon. Again, thank you.*

## Te Aroha Dramatic Society's *Steel Magnolia* by Robert Harling

Another production that was heartbreakingly cut down by Covid-19 after just two performances. As the title suggests 'the female characters are as delicate as magnolias but as tough as steel' This is a play that covers the full range of emotions from laughter to tears and Te Aroha Dramatic intends to welcome it back to the stage with a Gala performance when the time is right.

The cast line up shows their distinctive characteristics.

At Back: Truvy, Beauty Salon Manager (Erin Wigley), M'lynn, a regular client (Sarah Matafeo-Ross), her daughter Shelby (Sian Murray) and Annelle, Truvy's assistant (Jasmin Gorman)

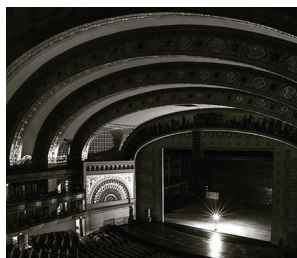
In Front: Clairee, wealthy widow of the ex-mayor (Jill Payne) and the inimitable curmudgeonly Ouiser Boudreaux (Mallie Hardy)



## The Ghost Light

There's a tradition in theatre that when the building is empty one light is left on, typically on a stand in the centre of the stage. This light is known as the ghost light. There are many stories about its origin - but its meaning is unmistakable. It means though the theatre is empty, WE WILL RETURN.

So here's to us. Those ghost lights are but temporary place holders. They are a sign. We might be down now - but our passion, our creativity, our drive is still centre stage. We'll be unplugging those ghost lights in no time. Until then -there's a ghost light - to let the world know we will be back.





**Kia Ora Koutou Katoa and a very warm welcome to you all.**

My name is Jake Hansen. I am a teacher of drama at Wakatipu High school in Queenstown and one of the new members to join the TNZ Executive in 2020. Being asked to write the introduction does feel a little out of place with the current state of our world but, I hope you find some distraction in the words below. I started out as a Southland Boys' High School student with a passion for the spotlight. This grew into a love for the dramatic and in particular musical theatre. As a member of the SBHS 1st XV this did turn a few heads, but I took pride in my difference and continued to lead the way in the form of being Head Boy in 2013.

From there I began a few years of self-growth and inventing ways to stay warm at Otago University. I had the pleasure of being mentored by the likes of Stuart Young, Lisa Warrington, and the lovely Hilary Halba. Otago really opened my eyes to the greater world of theatre and being taught by such passionate lecturers really set me on my path to teaching. After graduating through Allen Hall's red door I moved to Christchurch to study teaching. Again a passionate lecturer named Stuart Wise guided me through and into a practicum at Wakatipu. I was mentored there by Kate Moetaua and Alison Price and haven't wanted to leave since.

I am in all honestly gutted by the news around this year's Theatre Festival as this is a major highlight to my high performing students every year. I enter TheatreFest, as Kate did before me, as it is such a unique way to develop skills and relationships with students in a far more creative way. It is not in my eyes about the competition rather about a chance to develop, connect and express ourselves and the messages we think important to other like-minded people. Giving students the opportunity to meet and create with other students is also such an important part of this competition and it will be missed in our 2020 calendar.

For me, Drama teaching is so much more than the curriculum standards or a final grade. Kate was a real symbol of this, She was always a teacher first but she was also a shoulder, a friend, a mother, a therapist and a role model for all her students. She showed me the power of theatre and of teaching. Her door never closed and she often had students just spending time with her in breaks and after school. Her passing at the end of 2018 really shook the Queenstown community but, the legacy left by her has carried on. I have devoted my first years of teaching to her and making sure that her students have been well looked after. The reason I mention this is that Kate's example is now even more important for all of us.

We need to devote ourselves and our time to family and friends by keeping our socially distant doors open and support those that struggle to understand our changing world or those that are in danger from this pandemic. This is a key focus of mine as we start to develop online learning systems to support students from possible isolation. At first, I struggled to see how theatre could survive through a video chat or online platform. But by looking back at the lessons from those that inspired me, it is clear that as long as we continue to live by the values associated with a theatre, or with the key outcomes of Theatrefest, Isolation will only be from the virus not from the power of theatre and friendship. So as we continue forward into the unknown I leave you with three words. Take what you will from them.  
Care, Connect, Wash,

Stay safe

***Jake Hansen***



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) to access as many manuscript titles as you like. To request any plays and/or musicals, email our Script Coordinator, Nathan Mudge - [nathan@playmarket.org.nz](mailto:nathan@playmarket.org.nz)

### **Kiwi comedy**

#### **WINDING UP** by Roger Hall.

1f, 1m. Barry was a dentist, Gen was a lawyer. Now they are both in their seventies and retired. Retirement has gone swimmingly so far with the usual international cruises, yoga classes, attendance at funerals, dealing with body corporate issues and the occasional fall. But when Barry is diagnosed with leukemia the two need to deal with the prospect of death. A witty two-hander that captures the essence of married life in retirement.

**THE CAMPERVAN** by Kathryn Burnett. 2f, 3m. It's richlister Hugh Webb's 60th birthday and his impending mortality is starting to cast a long shadow. So, the man with everything announces he's got an extraordinary plan for the rest of his life and philanthropic legacy - he's going to sell everything and live modestly in a caravan. His family are appalled. They don't share Hugh's new values. Is Hugh's newfound decency and idealism a passing fancy or has he finally found his essential nature?

#### **GONE TO SEED** by Tim Hambleton.

5-6f, 4-5m. A gardening club, struggling for members, is suspected of dealing drugs by the local church Minister. When an inept detective is sent to investigate and, after a series of unfortunate incidents, the Minister loses face and the gardening club begins to grow in popularity.

*Winner – Original Script & Production, Regional Theatre Awards 2020.*

### **Back in time**

**KING JOHN** by Paul Percy. 6f, 8m. King Richard has died, his brother John has taken over, and Robin Hood has been executed. The Sheriff of Nottingham and his sidekick, Sir Guy of Gisborne, raise taxes and generally upset all those previously loyal to King Richard. Join us in the drama of the "Magna Carta" as Queen Isabella, and her daughters battle their wits against the foresters.

**THE NIGHT OF THE RIOTS** by Dean Parker. 2m. *The Night of the Riots* combines the section from Bruce Mason's *End of the Golden Weather* describing the time of the 1932 Auckland unemployed riots with a similar section from Jim Edwards' *Waiting for the Revolution*. Jim's father was the leader of the Unemployed Workers' Movement and Jim was present when his father was batoned down by police at the Auckland Town Hall. For Bruce, *this* was the end of the golden weather.

**PLAYING MOLIÈRE** by Gary Langford. 6f. Based on the story of Charlotte Delbo, a political prisoner in Auschwitz during WW II. Without the S.S. knowing, the prisoners rehearse and perform *The Imaginary Invalid* by Molière. As the Russians advance from the East the play builds to a powerful climax. A story of the triumph of the individual and of imagination.

### **New musicals**

**SHORTLAND STREET: THE MUSICAL** by Guy Langford. 8-24f, 7-28m. This musical will be loved by both those who have watched every episode of the TV show, and those that haven't. Laced with Kiwi humour and pumped full of catchy songs, this play promises a great time for audiences and performers alike.

**THE BONE THIEF** by Cassandra Tse and Bruno Shirley. 3f, 3m. In an old ex-mining town, a monster preys on local children. Twelve-year-old Aletta leads a life of privilege, but a friendship with an orphan boy and a love of stories leads her on a hunt for the monster. A dark fairytale with an original