

# Evolutionary festival is all ready to be staged

THIS year's 24:7 Theatre Festival is nearly upon us. Now in its seventh year, the festival gives new writing talent the chance to shine and bloom, with participants consistently winning awards at the annual M.E.N. Theatre Awards.

Festival founder David Slack has always said that the event should be in a stage of constant evolution, so this year, the set-up is slightly different. The hundreds of entries have been narrowed down to just 10 productions, each of which will have several performances at various times over the course of the week at 24:7's home this year, the Co-operative Society's New Century House. Four more plays are being given a rehearsed reading and there's also a series of late-night events.

This year's plays include Paul Osborne's *The Bluest Blue*. Directed by Paul Stonehouse, the play involves two strangers who meet on a bench outside York Minster.

The *Fading Hum*, written by Charlotte Essex and directed by Laura Keefe, explores concepts like guilt, death and estrangement, after Robin's unexpected arrival at his brother's farm.

Colette Kane's *Ways To Look At Fish* was a big hit at the 2008 24:7. Colette, and director Nick Moss, are back with *Hatch*, charting the heartbreaking homecoming of an absentee father and his grown-up children.

The *Inconsistent Whisper Of Insanity*, set in the 1920s during an unsuccessful uprising against the Russian government, is the latest from another M.E.N Theatre Awards success, playwright/director Ian Moore.

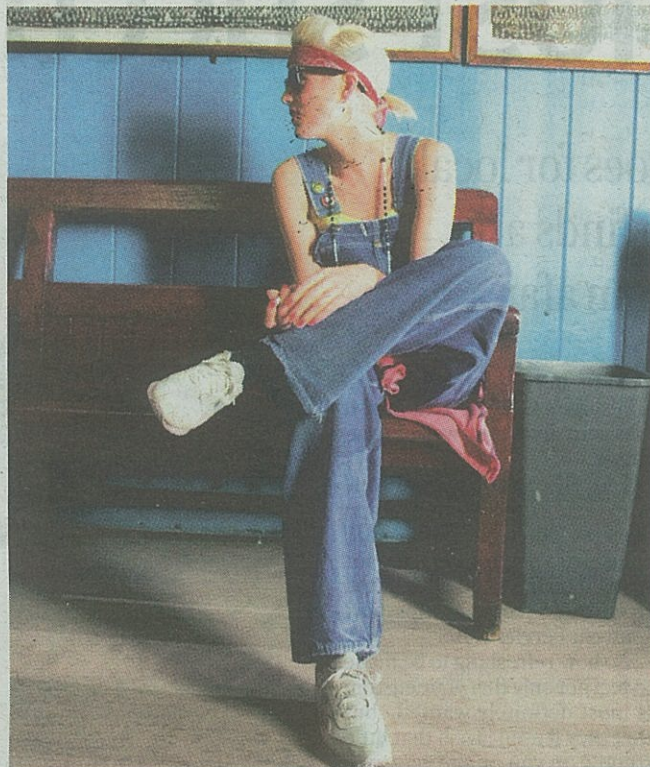
*Islanders*, a dark comedy by Dick Curran, is 'a climate-change love triangle,' while *Make Believe*, written by Luke Walker and Sally Lawton and directed by Mike Heath, looks at what happens when imagination and real life get mixed up.

Kim Jackson and Rebecca Mahon's play *No View From The Window* turns a decaying WC into a dramatic confession. *Pawn* is a new play from ex-police sergeant Brian Marchbank who started writing at the age of 50. A robbery at a pawn shop turns into a hostage situation and those involved may share more than a crisis.

In *Reeling*, by Sean Gregory, sisters Jude and Alice break into their elderly neighbour's house only to stumble across a wall of cassette tapes that are recordings of their entire lives. The cast includes M.E.N award winner Ruth Evans, David Cordon and 12-year-old local girl Hannah Hughes.

In *Sheepish*, by Joyce Branagh, a Welshman and a Yorkshireman are dressed as sheep, waiting for Dee in a field, to go to his 'fancy dress' party.

The rehearsed readings, at 6pm are: *Baby Shaped Hole* by



DEBUT Model Agyness Deyn in her first acting role in the film *Acid Burn* written and directed by Matt Greenhalgh

Julia Hogan, directed by Elizabeth Newman (Tuesday); *Domestic Bliss* by Roy Knowles, directed by Jim Poyser (Wednesday); *All Because Of Molly* by Paul Ferguson, directed by Martin Jameson (Thursday); and *A Lady Of Substance* by Jon Cooper, directed by Matthew Dunster (Friday).

There are also the four After Hours sessions, all starting at 10:30pm at £3 on the door. On Tuesday, there's Scriptworks on tour, where excerpts of new scripts will be presented.

Wednesday sees three UK short film premières, all made in the north west by people from the north west. *Acid Burn* is written and directed by Matt Greenhalgh, BAFTA Award-winning writer. The film features model Agyness Deyn in her first acting role.

Matt explains: "While I was waiting for contracts to be sorted, I decided to keep busy and write and direct a short film. Usually for me that means finding something I can't normally do in the marketplace, hence the non-Hollywood ending."

*Resting* has been written and directed by actors William Ash (an M.E.N. Theatre Award winner for *You Can See The Hills* at the Exchange Studio) and Andrew Knott (who played Lockwood in *The History Boys*).

Then there's *Master Motivator*, written by Janet Harrison and directed by Noreen Kershaw, who has directed *Coronation Street* and *Shameless* among many others. A local businesswoman, Janet produced this film by combining her entrepreneurial resolve with an earlier passion for writing and acting. John Henshaw, of *Early Doors*, and *Looking For Eric*, stars. Kevin Bourke will

host the event and chair a Q&A session with the writers.

On Friday, Elizabeth Newman, assistant artistic director at the Octagon Theatre, Bolton, chairs a discussion and Q&A on new writing, with a panel including Octagon artistic director David Thacker, playwright David Eldridge, and playwright and director Matthew Dunster.

Saturday night sees 24:7 ventures into the realms of a Comedy Sketch Night, featuring 10 brand-new short comedy sketches in competition.

»The 24:7 Festival is at New Century House from Monday until August 1. For more information, contact: 247thefestival.co.uk

## ► Journey into dark themes... and humour

SALFORD-BASED Happystorm Theatre Company brings local playwright Susi Wrenshaw's new drama *Be Rain For Me* to Salford Arts Theatre.

The play follows lifelong friends Leah and Willow, played by Wrenshaw, as they strive to transcend working in a fish factory in deepest Salford with only Greasy Gary for company.

*Be Rain For Me* is Susi's first full-length play and was developed through the Royal Exchange Theatre Writers Group and Contact Theatre's Scriptworks.

"It requires a strong cast to journey into the dark themes of the play while being able to bring to life the quirky humour of the characters," believes Susi, who trained as an actor at the Manchester Metropolitan School of Theatre, and has directing credits for plays with *Breathe Out Theatre* at Studio Salford and *Capitol Theatre*.

Joining Susi on stage as Willow's father Ray will be Russell Kennedy. Willow's mother Moth will be played by Jacqueline Redgewell, who has appeared in both *Emmerdale* and *Coronation Street*, whilst her 2003 film *Brown Paper Bag* won a BAFTA Award for Best Short Film. Arden School of Theatre graduate Amy Spencer plays Leah.

Happystorm Theatre Company was founded by partners Matthew Ganley and Susi Wrenshaw earlier this year. *Be Rain For Me* will be Matthew's directorial debut.

»*Be Rain For Me* is at Salford Arts Theatre, Kemsing Walk, from Thursday until July 31. For tickets, contact 0161 925 0111 or info@salfordartstheatre.co.uk



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