

New Zealand Post 
SEASON OF

HORSE

Play

BY KEN DUNCUMI



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WELCOME

HORSEPLAY, by New Zealand Post Mansfield Prizewinner, Ken Duncum, is something of a forgotten gem; a wonderfully comedic take on literary rivalry.

The play had a very short but popular premiere season some years ago at Wellington's tiny BATS Theatre - a terrific incubator for new work.

Too often, for a variety of reasons, these plays aren't picked up immediately by enough other companies and the works languish for want of production.

It's part of Auckland Theatre Company's commitment in acknowledging the legacy of NZ theatre writing to revive forgotten kiwi play scripts and HORSEPLAY is a little beautie – a bloody good yarn with rambunctious language and compelling characters; it's funny, it's informative and it's about us!

It's our great pleasure to have Simon Bennett back at Auckland Theatre Company to direct this latest production of HORSEPLAY. Simon is a great exponent of Ken Duncum's plays having directed one of his early works BLUE SKY BOYS (with Tim Balme and Michael Galvin) and the prize-winning production of FLIPSIDE – Ken's retelling of the Rose-Noelle maritime drama in which four men spent 119 days adrift at sea.

New Zealand Post are great champions of New Zealand literature - the New Zealand Post Book Awards, the New Zealand Post Readers and Writers Week and of course, the Mansfield Prize to name but a few. We're particularly pleased to be presenting this season of HORSEPLAY in partnership with them.

My huge thanks to Simon, his stellar cast, Tim Balme, John Leigh, Toni Potter and Elizabeth McCrae and the creative team, Tracey Collins, Bryan Caldwell and John Gibson for realizing this work so wonderfully.

Enjoy!

Colin McColl



Over the years, New Zealand has produced many extraordinary writers.



Two such writers – poet James K Baxter and novelist Ronald Hugh Morrieson – are celebrated in tonight's comical view of an imaginary meeting that could have taken place between the two in 1972.

HORSEPLAY was written by another of New Zealand's talented writers, Ken Duncum. Ken has been writing for theatre and television for more than 20 years and is regarded as one of New Zealand's leading playwrights. His contribution to literature was recently recognised when he became the 41st recipient of the prestigious New Zealand Post Mansfield Prize.

It is always a pleasure to see the works of talented New Zealanders brought to life. I congratulate the Auckland Theatre Company, director Simon Bennett and all those who have collaborated to bring the New Zealand Post season of HORSEPLAY to the stage. I know you will enjoy it.

Brian Roche
Group Chief Executive
New Zealand Post Group



Ronald Hugh Morrieson – **John Leigh**
James K Baxter – **Tim Balme**
Wilma – **Toni Potter**
Aunt – **Elizabeth McRae**

CREATIVE

Direction – **Simon Bennett**
Set & Costume Design – **Tracey Collins**
Lighting Design – **Bryan Caldwell, PhD.**
Sound Design – **John Gibson**

PRODUCTION

Production Manager – **Mark Gosling**
Technical Manager – **Bonnie Burrill**
Senior Stage Manager – **Fern Christie**
Technical Operator – **Robert Hunte**
Wardrobe Supervisor – **Kiri Rainey**
Horse Construction – **Helen Fuller**
Special Effects – **Film FX**
Properties Master – **Bec Ehlers**
Set Construction – **2 Construct**

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Presented as part of the
Auckland Writers & Readers Festival

In HORSEPLAY quotations from the writings of James K Baxter are used with the kind permission of the Baxter Estate

AUCKLAND THEATRE COMPANY WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING FOR THEIR HELP WITH THIS PRODUCTION: Amber McWilliams, www.jaefrew.com, www.fortunabooks.com, Robert Cross, www.prints.co.nz

THE NEW ZEALAND POST SEASON OF HORSEPLAY is the third Auckland Theatre Company production for 2010 and opened on May 6th.
THE NEW ZEALAND POST SEASON OF HORSEPLAY is approximately 125 minutes long with an interval.
Please remember to switch off all mobile phones, pagers and watch alarms.



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DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Hawera. Winter 1972. In the shadow of their impending deaths, two giants of NZ literature come face to face.

As far as anyone knows James K Baxter and Ronald Hugh Morrieson never actually met, but this is the central conceit of Ken Duncum's literary farce. Across one night, HORSEPLAY enmeshes its characters and audience in games of manipulation, storytelling and professional jealousy, as Ken's characters struggle to find sanctuary from their inner demons.

This is the fifth Ken Duncum play I have directed and my first stage work for eight years. I feel privileged to be given the opportunity to come back to work on HORSEPLAY -- I always find Ken's plays challenging, complex, rewarding and theatrically thrilling. I'm also delighted to be working with Tim Balme and John Leigh again in the theatre - we go way back to BATS Theatre days in the '80s - where we were leaping into the fray with Ken's plays such as JISM and BLUE SKY BOYS. I'm also wrapt to be making the professional acquaintance of the delightful Toni Potter and Elizabeth McRae.

Tracey Collins, Bryan Caldwell and John Gibson are the Dream Team. We've all come a long way since the

Watershed days, and it's a blast to be able to reconnect in the medium we started from.

My thanks to Colin and ATC.

Enjoy!
Simon Bennett
Director

SYNOPSIS

HORSEPLAY is a bloody good yarn and a cock-eyed salute to literary genius.

James K Baxter and Ronald Hugh Morrieson – the two great mavericks of kiwi literature – and the best of buddies. Yeah right!

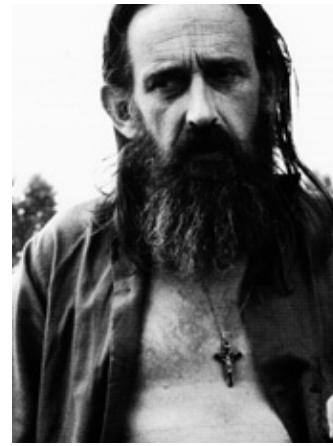
Baxter is on the run from the arty-farty literati. But when he hitches a ride with Morrieson to Hawera he gets more than he bargained for; a seriously pissed off rival, a dotty aunt, an oversexed girlfriend...and the backend of a horse.



STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH



Ken Duncum. Photo: Robert Cross ©



James K Baxter



Ronald Hugh Morrieson

ATC Literary Manager Philippa Campbell talks to Ken Duncum.

It's rather exotic to be interviewing a New Zealand playwright resident in the South of France. Congratulations on being the 2010 winner of the New Zealand Post Mansfield Prize. How is Menton treating you?

Very well – Menton has orange trees in the streets, and underneath them roam the ghosts of many a writer and artist. And there are echoes and shadows of forty previous Katherine Mansfield Fellows (I'm the 41st). It's strange because this little part of the world has been so comprehensively written about by New Zealanders that there's hardly a place you can visit or a vista you can look at that hasn't turned up in a NZ poem or novel. We've colonised it!

Where did the idea for HORSEPLAY come from? Were you a fan of Morrieson and Baxter before you began writing the play?

A bit of a fan of both – but I had to learn more about each of them to be able to write the play. That was fun – both Ron and Jim are good company.

Creating stories around writers and their work is generally considered to be fraught with dangers. You face this head on in HORSEPLAY. Was the risk of putting two great writers together part of the attraction?

I did want to write something with characters who could really use language, who weren't stuck in 'ordinary speak' – and who showed what a New Zealand version of Shakespearian language could be like, both in its poetry and its slang. It was a bit scary when I realized that my writing in the play would have to blend seamlessly with that of two of our greatest writers – no pressure – but I

was having fun by then and forged on regardless. The major reason writing about writers can be tricky is that they often don't do a lot – just kind of sit around and scribble or angst about writer's block - but Morrieson's own characters are always carried along in a whirlwind of macabre and bizarre plot and event, so I figured a story with him in it should do the same thing.

The play is the story of an imagined meeting between the two men. Could you tell us a little about the processes you went through fictionalising your protagonists?

I read as much as I could about both – and I read their work also. I remember going to the National Library to watch some video of Baxter reading *THE BALLAD OF FIRETRAP CASTLE*, trying to fix his voice in my mind. But after that, when I started to write, I tried to extrapolate from what I knew. Having got an idea of them (and knowing it was only an idea) I threw them together round a dead horse and figured out step by step how I thought they'd react, how they'd bring themselves and their preoccupations into the situation.

How did you deal with the balance of honouring the reality of Baxter and Morrieson and telling a good yarn? Did you approach this play differently from a work of pure fiction?

Not really, I tried to use the homework I did as a kind of base for everything. It was there at the bottom of my brain, I didn't go back to the books, it was time to invent, to play Baxter and Morrieson at their own game – making stuff up. Mind you, in both their cases their writing is very much an amalgam of the real and the fictional, and so is *HORSEPLAY*. All fiction is about inventing a lie that tells the truth. I used to say 'James K Baxter and Ronald Hugh Morrieson never met – and this is about the night it didn't happen'. I like to think that my lie gets at a truth or two about them both.

Were there any pieces of fascinating research that you weren't able to include in the play? The play is set in 1972. Apart from being a few months prior to the deaths of both men, were there other memorable things about that particular year that inspired you?

I was 12 in 72. It was a strange time. The hippie flower was fading, the

sixties dream was over, but in many parts of the country the 60's hadn't even started because the 50's were still going strong. You could hop in your Anglia or Vauxhall Velox and drive into the past. Somewhere between COUNTRY CALENDAR and BLERTA we were a confused little country.

In terms of things I loved that couldn't fit in the play – the Elvis Presley Memorial Record Room in Hawera springs to mind (I've still got the souvenir comb I bought there in the 80's); a lot of Baxter's poetry (particularly more of the Pyrrha sequence); and *THE CHIMNEY*, one of only two short stories that Morrieson wrote, and absolutely brilliant – perfect, my favourite NZ short story.

What do you think would have happened if Morrieson popped into Jerusalem one afternoon?

Nothing. Morrieson would have been far too uncomfortable at Jerusalem (and even W(h)anganui was too far away from home for him) and probably would've popped straight out again. Baxter wouldn't have engaged with Morrieson, I think, being too much on his own turf with his own band of followers and wrapped up in his own concerns. That's why in the play Baxter is thrust into Morrieson's world, at a disadvantage – and it's just the two of them, so they naturally become each other's audience and have to interact.

You have spoken about Baxter and Morrieson being 'verbal thoroughbreds' and the play resonates with a powerful celebration of language. What kind of opportunities did this open up for you as a playwright?

Poetry, wordplay, jokes, insults, metaphors, idioms, prayers – New Zild is a rich language with many unnamed and uncelebrated writers having contributed to it. Who invented 'cackleberries' or 'up the creek in a barbed-wire canoe'? Whoever you are, you're a poet and we salute you. I love it, I love the visual imagery of our language at its best – and the way it simultaneously represents down-to-earthness and flights-of-fancy. That's us. We've got our own way of speaking and it reflects who we are. And so do these two guys.

Besides, writing a play about inarticulate characters is like chipping your way out of prison with a spoon.

You've been writing for New Zealand theatre and television for over twenty years and you currently run the MA in screenwriting at the International Institute of Modern Letters at Victoria University in Wellington. How has the theatre scene evolved over the time you've been involved with it and are there any particular challenges it faces?

I don't think we know how amazing the theatre scene in NZ really is. There's so much of it for a start. It has boomed in the time I've been writing, there are so many playwrights now, and the general standard of work is so high. And it just continues to grow.

I think the most interesting change is that 25 years ago the audience was suspicious of New Zealand written work, now there's a prejudice in favour of it – New Zealanders are more likely to ask why they should bother to see a British, US or Australian play, how's it going to be relevant to them? We've come a long way.

HORSEPLAY enables us to get to know Ron and Jim, and Wilma and Aunty for one highly entertaining evening. And thankfully we don't have to clear up the mess. Who is the playwright-hitchhiker you would most like to pick up and spend the evening with?

In the world, Tom Stoppard maybe? I saw his play ROCK 'N ROLL in London in 2006 and again last year at Circa Theatre in Wellington. Brilliant. Made me laugh and cry and think – and it reveals something new every time I read it.

In terms of NZ playwrights I'm lucky in that I know most of them – a perk of having been around for this last very interesting 25 years – but I never did meet Bruce Mason, who started the whole thing rolling. When I was 15, at the South Pacific Festival in my hometown of Rotorua I saw him perform pieces from THE END OF THE GOLDEN WEATHER – so I guess I'll have to be satisfied with that. Unless I write a play about him ...

Celebrating great New Zealand stories

New Zealand Post is proud to be a Premier Partner of Auckland Theatre Company.

We're also proud to be assisting in the development and distribution of an education pack for HORSEPLAY to every high school in Auckland.

It is also free to download at www.atc.co.nz/educationunit/resources

MEMORIES OF FIRST SEEING HORSEPLAY

BY PAUL MILLAR



HORSEPLAY, Ken Duncum's imagined meeting between James K. Baxter and Ronald Hugh Morrieson, is a homage to two of New Zealand's most interesting and unconventional twentieth century writers. It is also a homage to the interesting and unconventional features of small-town New Zealand that are exemplified by Morrieson's mythologised town of Hawera which, in Duncum's words, 'overlays the real streets like a transparency.'

The first season of HORSEPLAY opened triumphantly at Wellington's BATS Theatre in November 1994. It was then that I saw it, at a performance also attended by some members of James K. Baxter's family. It was a memorable night for a variety of reasons. First and foremost was the play itself and the encounter

between two fatally flickering literary lights which, given all we know about Ronald Hugh Morrieson and James K. Baxter, makes Duncum's depiction of what might have occurred had the two met one dark night in Hawera eminently plausible. I remember, as we left the theatre, that Jacquie Baxter was shaken by the evening's performance: 'It was like Jim had come back to life,' she said. 'It was uncanny.' Uncanny too was Duncum's combination of slapstick and pathos, each element so essential to the play, yet neither unbalancing the whole. The arse of the horse's corpse wedged into Morrieson's front room, offered a flatulent gloss on proceedings with finely calculated bad timing. Yet for all its laughs and literary wit the overwhelming sense was that HORSEPLAY

was serious tragicomedy. Duncum's Baxter seemed most at peace with the noose firm around his neck, teetering precariously over the void, yearning as the real Baxter had for death. At its most fundamental it was a play about the stuff of literature; about language and the power of words—their attraction, force and authority—even for two writers who seemed otherwise directionless, who had lost or destroyed most of the things that once mattered, and were, as we knew but they didn't, on the threshold of ending life.

When Baxter goads Morrieson into one final, great, cathartic outpouring of verse (a marvellous pastiche by Duncum that seems one part 'Ode to Auckland', one part FORESKIN'S LAMENT, one part *CAME A HOT*

FRIDAY and one part brilliant originality) it's a reminder that, as Baxter famously asserted, 'words set in order are mental possessions' and that within each writer there remains a hidden seam of creativity to be mined. Not that either would find much more treasure; the subtle poignancy of HORSEPLAY depends upon our knowledge that each man dies without revealing what, if any, great works of literature he might still have in him.

Join Paul Millar on Sunday May 16th from 11.30 am – 12.30 pm at the Upper NZI Room, Aotea Centre as he unwraps his latest book *NO FRETFUL SLEEPER: A LIFE OF BILL PEARSON* at the Auckland Writers & Readers Festival. Paul is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Canterbury.



HORSE PLAY

We asked our Theatre Club members to compete in ATC's WORDPLAY challenge and were amazed with the results! How many other words can you make from the letters in HORSEPLAY? Our last count was 299 words. Engage with ATC online at www.atc.co.nz

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a	hole		oar	pleas	reaps	share	spay
are	holes		oars	ply	relay	sharp	spore
arse	hols	la	oh	polar	relays	she	spray
ale	holy	lah	pal	pore	rep	shear	spy
ales	hop	lahs	pals	pores	repay	Sheol	spy-hole
aloe	hops	las	pale	pose	reply	shape	sylph
alp	hope	lady	pare	poser	repo	shore	sea
alps	hopes	lap	pare	posy	rhea	Sherpa	slop
also	horsey	laps	parse	prase	rho	shoal	sale
ape,	horsy	lash	pas	pray	roe	shoe	sore
apes	hose	layer	pay	prays	rope	Shona	say
arose	hype	lea	play	prey	ropes	shone	yah
as	hyper	leash	plays	preys	ropy	shop	yea
ash	hypo	loch	ploy	pro	ropey	shy	ye
ashore	hale	lop	ploys	prole	rose	slap	yeas
ay	halo	lops	pole	prose	rash	slay	yeah
aye	halos	lose	poles	prosy	rasp	sloe	yeahs
asp	haloes	loser	pays	pyre	role	slope	yare
ear	harp	lye	payer	pyres	roles	sly	Yale
ears	harps	lay	paye	paler	reap	so	year
earl	harpy	lays	pea	pales	reaps	soap	years
earls	has	leap	peas	par	rosy	soapy	yap
early	hay	leaps	peal	parole	royal	soar	yaps
ease	hey	layers	peals	parsley	rye	sol	yes
easel	heal	lope	pear	pears	sale	solar	yep
easy	heals	lopes	pearl	per	sap	sole	yelp
er	hear	lore	pearls	players	saps	sepal	
era	hears	or	pearly	rap	sea	splay	
he	help	ore	Pease	rape	seal	sop	
horse	helps	ole	phase	rape	sear	sorely	
heap	her	opal	phrase	rapes	sepoy	spa	
heaps	hers	opals	phyla	ray	sera	soy	
hoar	hero	opera	plash	rays	seraph	soya	
hoary	hare	operas	player	real	shale	spar	
hoarse	hares	oral	plea	reap	shape	spare	

Reo, Haley, Harley, Hera, Oprah, Ora, Rae, Rhea, Sela, Lea, Leola, Lola, Al, Hal, Hayes, Hosea, Elroy, Ralph, Roy, Sol, Earl, Ely, Yo, Lars, Leo, Leroy, Posey, Ashley

BACKSTAGE WITH THE SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER

HORSEPLAY is set in late August 1972, in the large kitchen of an old family home in Hawera. The play takes place over the course of one night. The play also has very specific and detailed 'action sequences' that need to be honoured, and these have strongly informed the design of the set; its structure, architectural layout, and the logic of the particular floor

plan required to achieve all the spatial relationships and the dynamic action between the actors, the dressings and props, and the architecture. The characters are real, therefore the costume design needed to be "real clothes", which tells the story of, and gives a strong sense of self-styled individuality in a way that is completely believable, to enable capturing

each character's individual peculiarities and eccentricities.

As Simon and I looked more deeply into how to capture the psychological intent of the play's story and its characters, we wanted to develop a strong visual design language to speak of the play's expressionist realism. We discovered many conceptual

story contexts, which led us to try to create a strong sense of "NZ Gothic Expressionism". We looked to leading expressionistic NZ landscape painters from 1930's to 1950's, such as Rita Angus, Christopher Perkins, Doris Lusk, and William Sutton. We observed these paintings with their subtle ominous, yet intense compositions: angled, shaped architecture; distorted perspectives -

bright yet dusty worn colour palettes; a stylised textural realism - that all seemed immediately to resonate the world of the play. "The pearl of South Taranaki! Gateway to the north of Taranaki. Paris under the mountain! Hawera, mate." (Ron H Morrieson, in HORSEPLAY)

TRACEY COLLINS

Set and Costume Designer



CAST



JOHN LEIGH

“It is an honour to play one of our most colourful and mysterious writers, The Hawera Hermit, Ronald Hugh Morrieson. To quote Maurice Shadbolt: “He certainly takes first place on our eccentric tradition; he is by far our most original writer. And thus by far, perhaps, our most precious.” All Ron’s novels, including PREDICAMENT which was shot last year, have been turned into films. Surely a unique achievement in itself. Not bad for a bloke with no tertiary qualifications, who never really left his small hometown, was shunned, ignored by the literary establishment and died

broke at fifty. RIP Ron 1922 – 1972.”

John Leigh has appeared for the Auckland Theatre Company in Arthur Miller’s ALL MY SONS in 1997 and DEATH OF A SALESMAN in 1999. He was also in Marie Jones’ STONES IN HIS POCKETS in 2002. Since then he hasn’t been treading the boards much apart from the odd playreading and workshop. In fact John has been away from the theatre for so long he hopes he can still find it. If he can, he will definitely be playing Ronald Hugh Morrieson.

John’s film works include THE MAN WHO LOST HIS HEAD, WE’RE HERE TO HELP, SPOOKED and Channel 4 UK’s NOT ONLY BUT ALWAYS. For television, John played Air Vice Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory in THE KIWI WHO SAVED BRITAIN, which screened recently on Anzac Day, and featured as Sparky in OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE.



TIM BALME

“My professional theatre career began with a play by Ken Duncum called BLUE SKY BOYS in May 1990. It was directed by Simon Bennett. Twenty years later - here we are again. Older and wiser - well, definitely older. HORSEPLAY is a marvellous piece of writing and I’m surprised it hasn’t been performed more often. I saw its original production at BATS in Wellington 1994. It was indelible then and I hope our production will be even more so. Getting the opportunity to play a national icon such as James K Baxter is obviously an exciting prospect. Baxter was a man of great

contradictions; a genius who considered much of what he achieved as failure. The play catches him at possibly his most disillusioned; tormented by his inability to make sense of his God and find meaning in his own toils. Yet despite all this he remains charismatic, cheeky, irreverent and blackly comical as he peers into his soul looking for greater meaning to his ebbing existence.”

Tim graduated from Toi Whakaari in 1989. His theatre work since has included BLUE SKY BOYS, LET’S SPEND THE NIGHT TOGETHER and MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM. His solo show JIMMY COSTELLO, for which he received a Chapman Tripp Best Actor Award in 1997, toured extensively here and abroad. In 1999, Tim received a further Chapman Tripp for his portrayal of Benedict in Downstage’s MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

In 2003 Tim took a break from theatre and focussed on television work such as MERCY PEAK and MADDIGAN’S QUEST. Then in 2005 he made

a shift to writing for the screen full time, primarily on OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE. This year he took up the position as Head of Development at South Pacific Pictures.

HORSEPLAY is Tim’s first main bill appearance for Auckland Theatre Company.



TONI POTTER

“To be given the opportunity to get to know these writers a little better is perhaps the best thing about playing Wilma in this production. Morrieson and Baxter may not have ever met in real life but together in Ron’s house, months before their deaths, Ken Duncum gives an opportunity to put their souls to rest – or perhaps – turn over in their graves. It is a joy to be a part of such a fantastic New Zealand play and bring it to a new audience.”

Toni’s acting credits include CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF and EQUUS (Auckland Theatre Company), BASH,

SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER and more recently RUBEN GUTHRIE (Silo Theatre). For television, OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE, INTERROGATION, ORANGE ROUGHIES and SHORTLAND STREET as Alice Piper from 2005 – 2009.



ELIZABETH MCRAE

"I'm very happy to be in a play by Ken Duncum as I have admired his writing over the years. I like his take on Jim Baxter whom I met several times and on Ronald Hugh Morrieson, whose gothic novels I've enjoyed immensely. Being an only child I am nobody's Aunt. However in this play and in MUM'S CHOIR I play an aunt so I'm experiencing the kinship second hand. And Jonny Leigh is the nicest of nephews."

Elizabeth was a founding member of Mercury Theatre Company, where she also taught voice and speech. She later also acted for Theatre Corporate. Auckland

Theatre Company credits include THE CRUCIBLE, SPREADING OUT, COLLECTED STORIES, THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMANN, THE GOD BOY, THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS, SOCIAL CLIMBERS and UNCLE VANYA.

Other theatre highlights include ONCE A CATHOLIC, UNDER MILKWOOD, CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE, PYGMALION, THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS, HAPPY DAYS, NOT I and VINEGAR TOM.

Elizabeth was in the original cast of SHORTLAND STREET and played the character Marj for the first four years of the series. Other film and television credits include THIRTY DAYS OF NIGHTS, AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE, JUBILEE, SCARECROW (an adaptation of the novel by Ronald Hugh Morrieson) and NEVER SAY DIE. Elizabeth is an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM) for Services to Theatre. She has been a member of the Actors' Equity since 1968.

CREATIVE



KEN DUNCUM / PLAYWRIGHT

Winner of the 2010 New Zealand Post Mansfield Prize, Ken Duncum grew up in Rotorua and has been writing for theatre and television for over twenty years. His plays include a loose trilogy looking at the impact of music on New Zealand from 50s' rock 'n' roll vs the Beatles' era Brit invasion in BLUE SKY BOYS, to 70s' glam rock in JOHN, I'M ONLY DANCING and punk in WATERLOO SUNSET.

CHERISH won Best New Zealand Play at the Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards in 2003, as did TRICK OF THE LIGHT in 2002. FLIPSIDE, a retelling of a real-life maritime drama in which four men spent

119 days adrift at sea, was produced at Wellington's Circa Theatre in 2000 and in Auckland earlier this year by SmackBang Theatre.

Ken's most recently performed plays are PICTURE PERFECT at Circa Theatre and an adaptation of THE GREAT GATSBY which premiered at The Court Theatre and will be produced by Circa Theatre in its 2010 programme.

HORSEPLAY was originally staged at BATS Theatre in Wellington in 1994 and has been published by Victoria University Press as part of a volume of three of Ken's plays, entitled 'Plays 1: Small Towns And Sea'.

In 2001, Ken was appointed Director of the MA Scriptwriting programme at the International Institute of Modern Letters at Victoria University of Wellington.



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SIMON BENNETT / DIRECTOR

Simon Bennett has been working as a director and producer in theatre and television since graduating from Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School in 1988.

Simon was co-founder of the professional revamp of Wellington's BATS Theatre in 1989 where his productions included Ken Duncum's BLUE SKY BOYS (with Tim Balme and Michael Galvin), TWELFTH NIGHT and HAMLET (with John Leigh in the title role).

In 1991 Simon moved to Auckland where his favourite productions included THE SHREW and TWELFTH

NIGHT (Watershed Theatre), BLUE SKY BOYS and TITUS ANDRONICUS (Maidment Theatre). He also directed INTO THE WOODS and ASSASSINS for Watershed Theatre and Tim Balme's solo show JIMMY COSTELLO.

In 1995 Simon moved into television work, firstly in directing, then producing SHORTLAND STREET. In 2000, Simon directed Ken Duncum's FLIPSIDE for Circa Theatre, winning the Chapman Tripp award for Production of the Year. In the same year he established the New Zealand Actors' Company with Tim Balme, Robyn Malcolm and Katie Wolfe, directing touring productions of A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, Roger Hall's A WAY OF LIFE and LEAH for the 2002 NZ Festival.

Since 2002, Simon has worked exclusively in television. Highlights include producing the children's series MADDIGAN'S QUEST, directing MERCY PEAK and OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE, as well as producing and directing the upcoming tele-feature SPIES AND LIES.



TRACEY COLLINS / SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

Tracey has been designing stage sets and costumes for theatre and live event companies over 20 years. Favourite productions include THE HOLY SINNER, THIS IS IT and SPECTACLE OF ONE (Inside Out Productions) and LOUIS VUITTON CUP party events.

For the NZ Actors Company, she designed costumes for MIDSUMMER NIGHTS DREAM, A WAY OF LIFE and LEAH. Other set and costume designs include VIVA VERDI (NBR NZ Opera), ASSASSINS THE MUSICAL, INTO THE WOODS, THE HUNGRY

CITY and PINOCCHIO (Watershed Company), Massive Company's ALICE IN CYBERSPACE, STILL SPEEDING, 100 COUSINS, WHERE'S NEW NET and SONS OF CHARLIE PAORA (which toured to the Royal Court Theatre in London).

Tracey's repertoire also includes six years of design for film and television. In 2007, she received a NZ Screen Award for Best Contribution to Design for MADDIGAN'S QUEST and recently won the Best Production Design for the television feature A PIECE OF MY HEART. Other productions include DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY and the upcoming series THIS IS NOT MY LIFE. Tracey also created set decorations for feature films THE LION THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE and PRINCE CASPIAN.

As Co-Commissioner, Tracey has been involved with both the 10th and 11th Prague Quadrennial of Scenography. Other co-commissioning work includes 2003 PART which represented NZ and received a Special Honorary Award and the 2007 BLOW installation which featured the work of 13 prominent New Zealand performance designers.



BRYAN CALDWELL, PHD. / LIGHTING DESIGNER

"This is my first design for NZ while living overseas. Although physically remote in New York, I was able to attend the readthrough, rehearsals, and design meetings by the magic of video Skype and really fast broadband. In many ways, the design considerations for this production forcibly brought my attention back home. In contemplating the elements of NZ landscape and literature that formed the darkly gothic style of Morrieson and the biblical imagery of Baxter, a night in Hawera as imagined by this play was a counterpoint to

the harsh winter and rust-belt dereliction very present here in Syracuse, NY. Is there a difference between NZ and American gothic? I hope to get closer to the answer by opening night."

Bryan's most recent lighting designs for Auckland Theatre Company were THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE and BLACKBIRD. He has also lit for ATC THE PILLOWMAN, the musical HAIR (Audience Award for Best Lighting Design), THE BLUE ROOM, ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD, WAITING FOR GODOT, STONES IN HIS POCKETS, THE GOD BOY, WIT (Audience Award for Best Lighting Design), ART, CABARET, DEATH OF A SALESMAN, THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN, CLOSER, THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS, VITA AND VIRGINIA, JULIUS CAESAR, TWELVE ANGRY MEN, HONOUR, MASTERCLASS, ALL MY SONS, ARCADIA, MOLLY SWEENEY and UNCLE VANYA.

Over the last twenty three years, Bryan has lit more than two hundred productions for NZ's top theatre and event companies, including NBR NZOpera, the Watershed

Theatre, NZ Actors Company, the Mercury Theatre, and Inside Out Theatre. These include SONS OF CHARLIE PAORA at the Royal Court Theatre in London, THE HOLY SINNER at the Wellington International Festival of the Arts 2006, and Black Grace's AMATA for AK07.

His event designs have been seen in New York, Tokyo, and Hong Kong (the 150th Birthday Parties for Louis Vuitton), and in San Francisco, Sydney, and Paris (Inside Out Productions for Tourism NZ).

Bryan's work extends beyond the role of lighting designer. He was co-creator and co-designer of the opera event VIVA VERDI! (OperaNZ), and co-produced and co-adapted ALICE IN WONDERLAND (Aotea Centre). He also co-created the installations OUR NAME IS OBJECT and I HAD A THOUGHT (Artspace Auckland) and created the video installation SECRET CITY SCAPE in downtown Auckland. He recently earned a PhD in Bioengineering from the University of Auckland.

This design is Bryan's first while living overseas. He currently resides in upstate New York with his family, researching the electrical properties of the heart.



JOHN GIBSON / SOUND DESIGNER

“Tracey’s design is steeped in the colours of NZ painters Rita Angus and others. A similar match to the brilliant writing of Ronald Hugh Morrieson can be found in music in the extraordinary string quartets by my favourite NZ composer Anthony Watson. The parallels are extraordinary; similar dates, a similarly small range of works, a biting wit and alcoholism. This high octane and carefully planned music we felt had the power to drive the pace of this wonderful farce. The other music used in the production are piano pieces

from twin poles of classical and jazz. Ronald Hugh was a band pianist, his mother a concert pianist, both he and his mother made their living as music teachers. In the production we are using Consolation No.3 by Liszt together with AIN’T MISBEHAVING by the great Fats Waller, a man who sold his songs for hamburgers but whose art, like Morrieson’s, has kept smiling ever since...”

John has been composing original music for New Zealand theatre, film, dance and television since 1980. Since that time he has composed over 100 scores and sound designs for theatre.

This year he has composed music for two New Zealand International Festival of the Arts productions, 360 and MARK TWAIN & ME IN MAORILAND. He is currently working on a television documentary about Ngaio Marsh and a sound score for an installation for the Taupo Festival with his partner Shona McCullagh.

In 2009 he received a Qantas Film and Television award for his score for Vincent Ward’s film RAIN OF THE

CHILDREN.

Previous works for Auckland Theatre Company include OLIVER!, THE POHUTUKAWA TREE, THE WIFE WHO SPOKE JAPANESE IN HER SLEEP, CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF, WHO NEEDS SLEEP ANYWAY?, WHERE WE ONCE BELONGED, THE BLONDE THE BRUNETTE AND THE VENGEFUL REDHEAD, EQUUS, THE DUCHESS OF MALFI and the arrangements and musical direction of SWEET CHARITY.



GROWING UP IN HAWERA

BY JUDY LAWLEY

Like just about everyone else, I never met Ronald Hugh Morrieson. My first acquaintance was with *THE SCARECROW* when my mother-in-law took a leading role in the film. Then I learned he was a bit of a chum of my Dad's – Saturday nights at the local dances. And so these little links have continued.

One memorable trip down memory lane occurred when I was checking up on my family home, which has since been replaced by a Warehouse, just as the Morrieson's was famously replaced by a KFC. That's not an every day event in a small town, with endless land close by. I had promised a friend to check out his old family home too – and what do you know? I found that my friend's house was the green one smack in the middle of Marianne Muggeridge's painting of the view from Morrieson's room.

That painting was hung in Morrieson's Café which itself had replaced 'The People's Meat Supply' where Dad trod the concrete and sawdust for thirty five years, and where I waited after school each day for my ride home. The other

kids walked or biked, but there was plenty of polio around Hawera in the fifties and I ended up with a bung left leg. But the polio gave me an extra dollop of determination to take advantage of the extraordinarily good education offered in a seemingly dull town that sits flatly in stark contrast to the bountiful pastures of the dairy lands that surround it and the stunning slopes of Mt Taranaki.

It has often been noted that a disproportionate number of New Zealand leading lights have come from Hawera. I may not be one of those 'flash Harries' as a true Hawerite would call them, but prizes at the Hawera competitions, the dux prize and piano lessons at St Joseph's convent, and a wealth of literature and theatre experience from Hawera Repertory and an extraordinary speech teacher, all led to an Oxford degree and a love of theatre and music.

It has also been noted that Hawera can be the butt of the sort of Kiwi stories that talk of weird folk and strange goings on. Morrieson was not

the only one to have a bit of fun with a little town with an interesting underbelly. Hawera cops the double whammy of icy mountain blasts and the prevailing westerlies. The trees all bend and not much grows very tall, but people grow strong out of that, they take firmly on the chin whatever life throws at them -- and they make damn sure they have the last laugh. The 'we know the story' jokes do the rounds quietly but thoroughly, and I love the one that goes, 'all those scribbles Ronald Morrieson's aunt cleaned out of the attic could have been worth a fortune'.

I made the big choice every young Hawera person makes on leaving Hawera High. I hit the big city and never returned for more than family visits. But the school reunion was the best party you could find on the entire planet and I hold forever to my memories of growing up in a place that is special – but as they say in those parts "I'm damned if I know why".

Judy Lawley is a Waitakere City Councillor.



Print of painting "From Ronald Hugh Morrieson's"
by Marianne Muggeridge reproduced courtesy of www.prints.co.nz

'VERY TRAGICAL MIRTH': ROUGH PLAY WITH A HORSE

BY DAVID CARNEGIE

Ken Duncum's *HORSEPLAY* embraces the clash of opposites in its imaginary 1972 meeting between the famous poet James K. Baxter and the then-unknown novelist Ronald Hugh Morrieson. Baxter was educated, widely published, critically acclaimed, well-travelled, and a representative of poetry and high culture; Morrieson was uneducated, had published only two novels, was unknown, a stay-at-home, and committed to popular culture. Jim, the reformed alcoholic, abandoned his wife and children to journey to Jerusalem; Ron was a drunkard still living in his mother's house with his aunt in Hawera.

The 'mirth' is multiple, but I would emphasize two aspects of the play's portrayal of Ron: first, the physical comedy, and secondly his adept storytelling. The extraordinary entry of the horse justifies the title of the play, but also presents a considerable physical obstacle (always useful in farce), and even the horseplay of a counterweight and counterblast to excessive literary pretensions. Its physical presence gives particularity to the long

yarns Ron spins about the dreaded Voot family (from his posthumous novel *PALLET ON THE FLOOR*) and the appalling death of Cyril Thompson (a character from *SCARECROW*). Even Jim's criticism of Ron's literary achievement eventually becomes a life and death issue, with the horse as inflexible arbiter.

The 'mirth' does not actually turn 'tragical', but it is certainly serious, as all good comedy is. Ron's concern is that as a writer he 'might turn out to be one of those poor buggers who get discovered after they're dead' (as is in fact the case). Ron's despair is matched by Jim's, but in language of lyric intensity: in his attempt to seduce Ron's girlfriend Wilma, Jim woos her with one of his famous Pyrrah poems:

*The thought of your body
Sets me in mind of the white*

*Cataract . . . leaping two
thousand feet*

Down to the green womb

Of the bush below—

In more serious mode, Jim declares that 'Poems are trash' as he challenges God's



purpose for him: 'Why did you call me to Jerusalem? To show me I couldn't hack it! Husband, father, healer, helper—all in the dust! . . . Knock me off my perch!'

The excessive despair of both writers is jolted in unexpected ways by the two women in the play, and a kind of redemption is found through Ron's music and satiric adaptation of a famous Baxter poem, and Jim's final conversation with God (plus the impertinent blessing of sleep). Jim has moved from sober to drunk, from cold to warm, from flight to rest, from impotent to sexual, from 'defeated' to poet again, and from despair to hope. Ron's journey is parallel: from drunk to drunker, from silence to music, from lover to loner, from 'unsung' to writer, and from anguish to peace. At every level—physical, sexual, artistic, and spiritual—Ken Duncum presents us with food for thought as well as farce for joy.

And with a horse on stage, critical analysis can always expect to be deflated.

David Carnegie is Professor of Theatre at Victoria University of Wellington.

WHAT'S ON IN THEATRES AROUND THE COUNTRY?

AUCKLAND THEATRE COMPANY

THE TELSTRACLEAR SEASON OF STEPPING OUT

By Richard Harris

SKYCITY Theatre
10 June – 3 July

Bruce Mason Centre
8 – 10 July

Clarence Street Theatre,
Hamilton 15 – 17 July

TSB Theatre, New
Plymouth
23 & 24 July

Hawkes Bay Opera House,
Hastings
30 & 31 July

Baycourt Theatre, Tauranga
5 – 7 Aug

Mavis Turner holds her weekly tap class for a mixed bunch of cheerful, if rhythmically challenged individuals. They've come to escape the dull routine of their lives. That's until they're invited to perform at a high-profile gala event. A hilariously funny and heartwarming comedy about doing what you love - but doing it just a little bit better!

SILO THEATRE

Auckland

WHEN THE RAIN STOPS FALLING

By Andrew Bovell

Herald Theatre
4 Jun – 3 Jul

Year 2039 – fish are almost extinct. Rainfall is incessant. Earth has been ravaged by years of abuse. The scars left by our ancestors are deep, marking the environment and humanity itself. A powerful story of compassion, transformation and survival.

CENTREPOINT THEATRE

Palmerston North

FOUR FLAT WHITES IN ITALY

By Roger Hall
10 Apr – 29 May

With a copy of "Lonely Planet" in one hand and an Italian phrase book in the other, recently retired librarians Adrian and Alison feel prepared to face the excitement of la bella Italia. But when their best friends suddenly drop out of the trip, are they really ready to share their precious holiday with their new neighbours?

BATS THEATRE

Wellington

THE GIANT FACET

Presented by Medlock & Musgrove
11 – 15 May

High octane characters, absurd realisations and comic lightening bolts pulled from the backend of a genius. The writers of the smash hit CHRIST ALMIGHTY! and nominees for Best Newcomer in '09 NZ Comedy Guild Awards are back in action with guest stars Fleur Saville and Harry McNoughton. Go Harry!

CIRCA THEATRE

Wellington

THE NERO SHOW

By Paul Jenden & Gareth Farr
15 May – 19 Jun

Lights, action, ego -- it is 1963 and a live TV show is about to be broadcast from Nero's mansion, hosted by Seneca, the famous philosopher and TV personality. Rome's most infamous Emperor has been dropped squarely into the life and times of the glamorous 1960s and the story of his rise and fall begins to look all too familiar.

DOWNSTAGE THEATRE

Wellington

LE SUD

By Dave Armstrong
1 – 19 Jun

LE SUD is a rollicking political satire that warmly pokes fun at three cultures, two islands and one country. Imagine South Zealand (Le Sud) has become an independent French-speaking nation and that today Le Sud is a prosperous country where people work only 30 hours a week and enjoy long wine-fuelled lunches while North Zealanders work long hours for little rewards.

THE COURT THEATRE

Christchurch

THE SEAGULL

By Anton Chekhov
15 May – 12 Jun

The family and friends of a famous actress gather at her estate for an unforgettable evening where lives, passions and dreams meet. By turns tragic and amusing, intelligent and universally recognisable, Chekhov's characters perfectly portray the struggles and ecstasies of unrequited love and the torment of unrealised ambition.

FORTUNE THEATRE

Dunedin

THE 39 STEPS

Adapted by Patrick Barlow
21 May – 12 Jun

Our handsome all-action hero Richard Hannay encounters dastardly murders, double-crossing secret agents and, of course, devastatingly beautiful women, in a race against time to save the British Empire.

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Metro

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