



ECCO: March 2015



Letter from the Chair

Here I am, finally, the new Chairperson of the ECC, much heralded in the January ECCO by our Editor Janet Middleton. I must remember not to go travelling to the other side of the world and so miss the all-important AGM.

My association with the ECC goes back many years, more than I like to admit. Suffice to say that I was first a member of the Committee when 'Blackie' Blackwell was the Chairman some time in the 1980s. So my credentials are good and I am looking forward to taking over the helm.

First let me say a few words of thanks to Conrad our departing Chair. He has worked, and continues to work, tirelessly for the ECC and Brussels amateur theatre in general. As actor, director, set designer, set builder and, perhaps most importantly, as IT innovator he has dragged the ECC into the 21st century. He continues to fill many of these roles and has not really stepped down at all.

We have a busy few months ahead of us. Our March production of *Tom and Viv* directed by Janet Middleton is well on the way to perfection and that will be swiftly followed by our FEATS entry *War Brides* directed by Conrad Toft (what did I tell you!)

Lyn Wainwright

chair@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com

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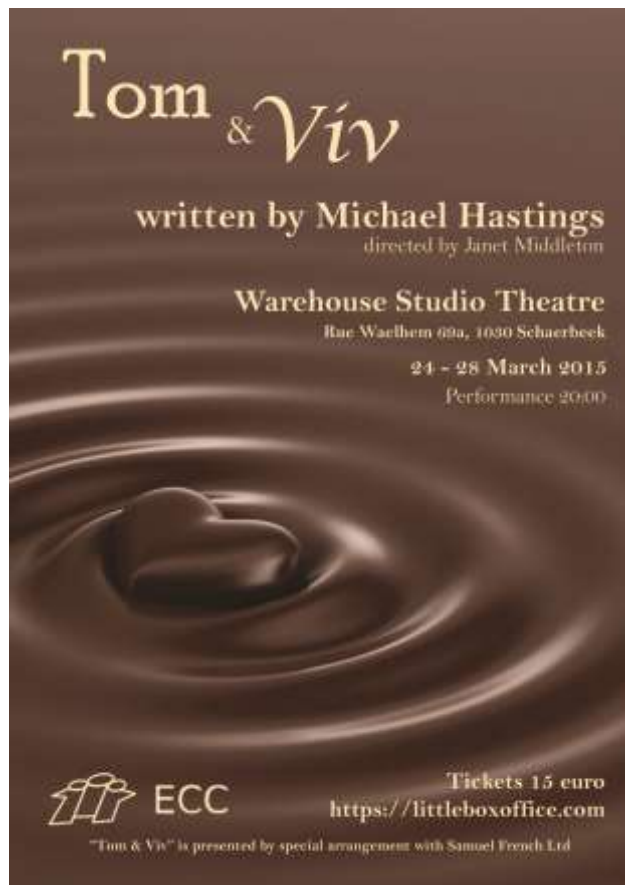
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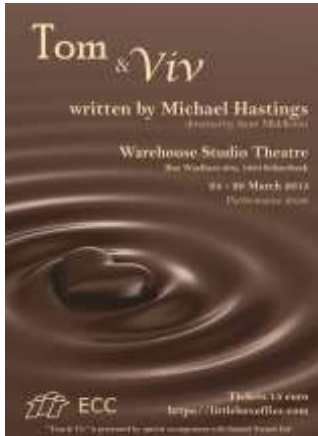
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to go
directly to
the Box
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If you have any contributions to ECCO, please send them to Janet at ecco@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com

The next ECCO will come out in May 2015

Deadline: 15 April



Tom & Viv

By Michael Hastings

Directed by Janet Middleton

24 – 28 March 2015

The Warehouse Studio Theatre

<https://thelittleboxoffice.com/ecc>

Director Janet Middleton writes: In his early twenties T. S. Eliot wrote poetry that remains unprintable even today in publications such as ECCO. If you want to read some of his ribald, racist and distinctly crude poetry it is difficult to find online, but a couple of short excerpts are included in *Tom and Viv*.

In 1915, aged 26, Eliot married Vivienne Haigh-Wood. Five years later *The Waste Land* was published:

APRIL is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.
Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.

Was marriage to Vivienne responsible for Eliot's dramatic change in style? Did she, as some think, contribute to his greatest work? Or was it simply a case of a young man maturing and finding his real voice? What cannot be denied is that a marriage to a woman suffering from a debilitating hormonal imbalance for which the recommended treatment was a toxic mix of alcohol and ether-based medicines, a treatment that resulted not in a cure but in further confusion and inappropriate behaviour, is sure to have affected Eliot in some way. So little was known about Vivienne's illness, that it was diagnosed as a 'moral imbalance' and a 'disease of the head', and she became one of the 30,000+ respectable women incarcerated against their will in mental homes under the strict Lunacy Act, and indeed she was lucky not to have been lobotomised: another favoured treatment for such sufferers at the time.

Given the depressing subject matter, Michael Hastings has injected into the play a great deal of humour. Not only does he quote from Eliot's *King Bolo*, but there are some wonderfully funny lines and definite silliness that is causing the cast, and director, some concern. Blocking has had to be adjusted to avoid a particular young man catching another's eye on a certain line (you know who you are), and Sophie's (Vivie's) skills with a whoopee cushion are not to be missed! Hastings wrote of this play: *I have tried to write a play about this family. For my sins, notwithstanding the grief and sadness here, I have also tried to write a comedy in Tom and Viv. I intended a comedy on the same terms as Chekhov understood comedy ... To my mind there is something deeply ignorant inside this Haigh-Wood family and their American son-in-law; each and all responsible for the 'painted shadow' of their daughter Vivienne.*¹ I hope we have done his fabulous play justice.

¹ Almeida Theatre Brochure, 2006

Tom & Viv: Rehearsal Pictures



Aladdin: Review

One of the joys of a Pantomime is that it gives people who have not been involved before the chance to join in a large production in a relaxed and fun atmosphere. Therefore, it is with great delight that this month's review is by someone completely new to the ECC: Tim Van Rie, better known and loved as PC Jan.

In January I was doused with flour. I struggled to retain my balance on a slippery tarpaulin. I was fed through a mangle, thrown into a giant washing machine, then shrunk to the size of a Ken doll. With my partner (but *without* my trousers), I chased a juvenile delinquent through an ecstatic crowd. I enjoyed it immensely.

As a native Belgian, 'Aladdin' was my first experience with Panto. When Henri (the director) asked me to take part, I had no idea what I was signing up for. Like many continental Europeans, I thought 'pantomime' involved a pale-faced mute trapped in an invisible box. Instead, Henri was looking for someone who could speak English with a Dutch accent. I was to play a dull-witted policeman, 50% of a comic duo. Olly Kaye, who had already been cast for the other (francophone) half, looked quite a bit like me. Above all: it would be a lot of fun ... and so it was! I discovered an enthusiastic and welcoming gang at The Warehouse in Schaerbeek. Henri and Hugo (Emperor), two perfect English gentlemen, were a reassuring presence. Cath (Wishee) drove us on with her gusto and endless knowledge of all things panto. They had assembled a terrific cast: Genies of Ring and Lamp, a Princess, an IT nerd, a camel, hand-maidens, a choir, street urchins and even a GHOST! There was a carefully crafted script, Yorkshire tea, and plenty of banter.

As a novice, I could not help but be confused at times. Aladdin was played - brilliantly - by a girl named Izzy. Chris, who played his/her mum, was a great actor, but unmistakably a man. Why were we booing and cheering our fellow cast members during rehearsals? Finally: What was a slosh scene, and why did we need to bring a change of clothes for it? Any doubts I had I kept to myself, afraid that perfect villain Conrad would throw me off the nearest cliff.

Pretty soon, I took this for what it was: a chance to be a child again. Playing a policeman in Old Peking provided me with a waterproof excuse to order nunchucks, the elusive toy of my boyhood. (We never used them, going for truncheons instead. But that is beside the point). There were stage fight workshops, some memorable singing sessions and of course: plenty of sweets.

As the date of the performances approached, the props arrived: rickshaw, dragon, fluorescent Manneke Pis. I decided to drop the Dutch accent and went for something slightly more Flemish. Olly turned out to be a physical comedy genius. I was grateful to follow his lead. We tried on our costumes. The Peking Police Force got a fantastic vintage 1980s Belgian police uniform. We finally knew our lines, and forgot surprisingly few of them over the Christmas break.

Then, just after New Year, we arrived at the Cultural Centre of Auderghem. I was taken aback by the sheer size of the theatre. The backdrops, shipped in from England (or China?) were magnificent. The dressing rooms were equipped with speakers, allowing us to follow the action on stage and – just as important – the audience's reaction.

Oddly, I remember fairly little of the show itself. Our five performances have somehow blended into one happy, colourful rush. A few acts do stand out: the opening scene with Abanazar and the Genie of the Ring! Twankey's biscuit juice!! The ultraviolet carpet ride!!! But mostly: the audience. Boys and girls rushing down to the stage, reaching out for candy. Screams of excitement and horror, as the Genie threatened to throw a bucket of dough into the crowd. Children yelling 'Wishee, Wishee, Wishee' at the top of their lungs. Later, upon closer inspection, my colleague and I discovered that quite a few of these kids were old enough to have a driver's licence.

My first panto was terrific fun, and I'm a bit sad that it is now BEHIND ME! Well, boys and girls, you know what that means. *Oh well, we'll have to do it again then, won't we?* Hope to see you soon!

In the picture: PC Jean (Olly Kaye) and PC Jan (Tim Van Rie).



Aladdin Photographs

With thanks to the various photographers: Richard Kitt, Kristina Kardum, Julia Coleman, Edward Strange, Rachel Heijkoop and Oliver Kaye.



War Brides: Feats 2015

Our entry for FEATS 2015 is *War Brides* by Marion Craig Wentworth.

Director Conrad Toft writes: Europe is at war. The young women of a small country village are being strongly encouraged to become "war brides", to marry the soldiers going into battle and produce the next generation of soldiers for the Empire, but what happens when some of them refuse?

This is the premise behind Marion Craig Wentworth's play, which was a runaway success in America in 1915 and made into a 1916 film before being banned when the USA joined World War One.

The ECC will be taking this one-act play to FEATS in Hamburg this year, and you'll have an opportunity to see it here in Brussels from 14-16 May at the Warehouse Studio Theatre.

There is a great cast including well known faces such as Peyton Cimino, Andy Blumenthal, Gareth Lewis, Joanna Patrick and relative newcomers to the Brussels stage: Richard Daly (Don Juan), Izzy Poston (Aladdin), and Amanda Ekdahl. The show will be supported by an experienced and talented crew.



CAST Lighting Workshop Report

Huge thanks to Barbara Daw for taking the initiative and organising this interesting workshop focusing (pun intended) on how she runs the lighting in The Studio, and which was offered free to members of all the Brussels-based Am Dram groups. Barbara stressed this was simply her sharing her personal way of running things and not a professional workshop.

Assisted by Lyn Wainwright, Barbara introduced us to the different lamps that are used in The Studio; how they are operated; the system for connecting the lamps to the lighting board via the dimmer packs; the maths involved to ensure that no circuits are overloaded and briefly described to what effect the lamps can be used (including the use of gels and gobos). We were talked through the role of the lighting person in a production, and the commitment and availability needed when you take on the role. We learnt the theory, and practice, of rigging, and importantly, Barbara gave us a long list of safety precautions: from ensuring that there is no power on when you are rigging the lights to wearing strong footwear.

Then there was the 'Paperwork' that a lighting operator works from: a plan of The Studio with the lighting grids shown so that a lighting plan can be drawn up, the lighting rig sheet and the cue sheet to be worked through from an annotated script.

Quite a lot to get through you might think in 3 hours on a Saturday afternoon!

The workshop was aimed at people interested in knowing more about how lighting works and/or willing to become a lighting operator in The Studio. Therefore we looked at The Studio's lighting board, which can be operated manually or by pre-set programming. And of course, in The Studio we have to do all the rigging ourselves, so we had a go at that!

It was great to see an enthusiastic group of people who were a mix of the innocent and the already experienced, including 'completely new to Brussels but keen to get involved'.

Before the workshop to me a theatre light was, well, a theatre light. But it's more complicated than that (of course it is!) There are the Floods, which are used as House Lights in The Studio; Fresnels (I think they are rather sweet) which give soft-focus, intimate lighting; PCs with a big beam for general washes and Profiles which give a hard-edged/spotlight beam.

And so I repeat: Thank You Barbara, it was an interesting and useful afternoon. If anyone is interested in learning more about lighting, or in the people willing to run the lighting on their shows, please get in touch with CAST via info@theatreinbrussels.com.

Janet Middleton

Left to Right: Profile, PC, Fresnel, Flood



ECC NEWS

Committee News

We are delighted that Lyn Wainwright has agreed to Chair our committee, and that Boff Muir has joined the Committee.

Committee	Role	Contact us at:
Lyn Wainwright	Chair	chair@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com
Janet Middleton	Secretary & Ecco	ecco@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com
Martin Blackwell	Treasurer	treasurer@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com
Andy Ing	FEATS	feats@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com
Chris Jones	CAST Rep	chris@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com
Boff Muir		Boff@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com
Joanna Patrick	Webmaster	web-admin@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com
Sara Hammerton	Publicity	sara@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com

Lyn writes: FEATS (Festival of European Anglophone Theatrical Societies) is set to play a large part in our activities over the next couple of years. Not only are we participating in the Festival in Hamburg this season but the ECC will be hosting the event here in Brussels in 2016. This is a huge undertaking which will draw on all our resources so do get involved!

Apart from FEATS we are building an exciting programme of plays and events. Several proposals have already been accepted but we are always looking for new proposals, in particular for our March 2016 slot.

Date of Next Committee Meeting: 19 March

CALLING DIRECTORS

We are looking to fill our March 2016 slot – if you have a play you would like to direct, please contact one of the committee members above before the next committee meeting.

AUDITIONS

Mrs Klein **by Nicholas Wright**

Audition dates: 21, 23, 26 April

Location: Warehouse (bar room)
Rue Waelhem 69A, 1030 Bruxelles

Set in 1930s London, Mrs Klein is based on true events and real people. It features three strong-willed women – all of German/Austrian Jewish origin and, crucially, all psychoanalysts.

Mrs Melanie Klein (52) – a famous, pioneering child psychoanalyst

Melitta (early 30s) – her daughter

Paula (early 30s) – a refugee from Berlin

Melanie Klein has just lost her son in what appears to be a climbing accident. His death brings the long-standing conflict with her daughter Melitta to a sharp climax. Professional rivalries mix with visceral family resentments – and taboo-breaking psychoanalytic theories. Caught (or carefully positioned) between the warring mother-daughter pair is Paula – Melitta's friend and Mrs Klein's would-be protégée.

Contact: Jonathan Stockwell (director) on 0496 566 907, Jonty@skynet.be

Goodbye Michael



Michael Hales has been a stalwart of the Brussels Am Dram scene for (discrete cough) years, and he has brought joy and laughter to many – both on- stage and off! Michael, we are really going to miss you, but are delighted that you have already made the acquaintance of the nice lady Chair of the local English thespis.

It's hard to understand why you decided to buy a new home so far away (pictured right), but we wish you a long

and happy retirement in the sun.



MONTHLY PLAY READINGS

Wednesday 4 March

7.45pm for 8pm - Chez Mary

Diana Morton-Hooper will lead us in reading

TAKING STEPS

By Alan Ayckbourn

The play is set in a dilapidated Victorian three-storey country house, reputedly a former bordello and said to be haunted by a deceased prostitute. There are six characters in the play:

- **Elizabeth:** Former dancer, retired as a result of her marriage; now in perpetual indecision about whether to leave her husband; her effort to do so sets off much of the action in the play
- **Roland:** Elizabeth's unappreciative husband; a businessman who is a major presence in the bucket industry; alcoholic
- **Mark:** Elizabeth's brother, attempting to save his one-sided relationship to Kitty and fulfil his dream of opening a fishing tackle shop
- **Kitty:** Arm-twisted into engagement with Mark; having left him at the altar once, she has been persuaded to come back to him after her arrest for suspected solicitation; feels trapped into always being part of other people's dreams (including Mark's fishing tackle shop)
- **Leslie:** Dodgy builder, on the brink financially; desperate to sell the house (currently rented) to Roland
- **Tristram:** Roland's solicitor; inarticulate and unassertive; unwittingly causes absolute havoc. For Ayckbourn, for all of Tristram's apparent ineffectuality, his is the central role in the play

IMPORTANT

Although Mary and Barbara are still very much our guiding lights, Mary is no longer going to ring around to remind people about the meetings, and so you will now only hear about them by reading Ecco, Ecco Flash or via Facebook. However, in addition, every month Janet will be emailing a reminder to people who have attended in the past and who want to be on the Play Reading email list. **If you would like to be added to the ECC Play Reading List, please email her at ecco@ecc.theatreinbrussels.com.**

We are now asking people to register as coming along via a Doodle link: all you will have to do is click on the link, add your name to the list under 'Table View', click in the box and then 'Save' your entry. If you have any problem with this, please do not hesitate to contact Janet - or simply to ring Mary on **02 345 8583** as usual! She has a message service if she's not there.

If you would like to come along in March please click here:

<http://doodle.com/2ktzgmvtduyzudq>

Contributions of interval drinks or nibbles always welcome!

Future Date: 1 April

FORTHCOMING PRODUCTIONS

ECC	<i>Tom & Viv</i> by Michael Hastings 24-28 March 2015
American Theatre Company	Café Theatre 21-25 April 2015
BLOC	<i>The Pajama Game</i> by Richard Alder & Jerry Ross 4-7 June 2015
Brussels Shakespeare Society	<i>As You Like It</i> by William Shakespeare 9-13 June 2015

Click on the name of the theatre group above to go directly to their website.
For more information and auditions see also www.theatreinbrussels.com

YOU MIGHT ALSO BE INTERESTED IN

NT Live now screening at Utopolis, Mechelen. [Click here for further details](#)

12 March	Behind the Beautiful Forever
26 March	A View from the Bridge
16 April	The Hard Problem
14 May	Man and Superman

KVS has regular productions subtitled in English. Visit their website to find out more: <http://www.kvs.be/en>

Fun, Food & Acting: Once a month a unique presentation at Theatre de la Toison D'Or in association with Brussellife: <http://www.ffact.be/#>