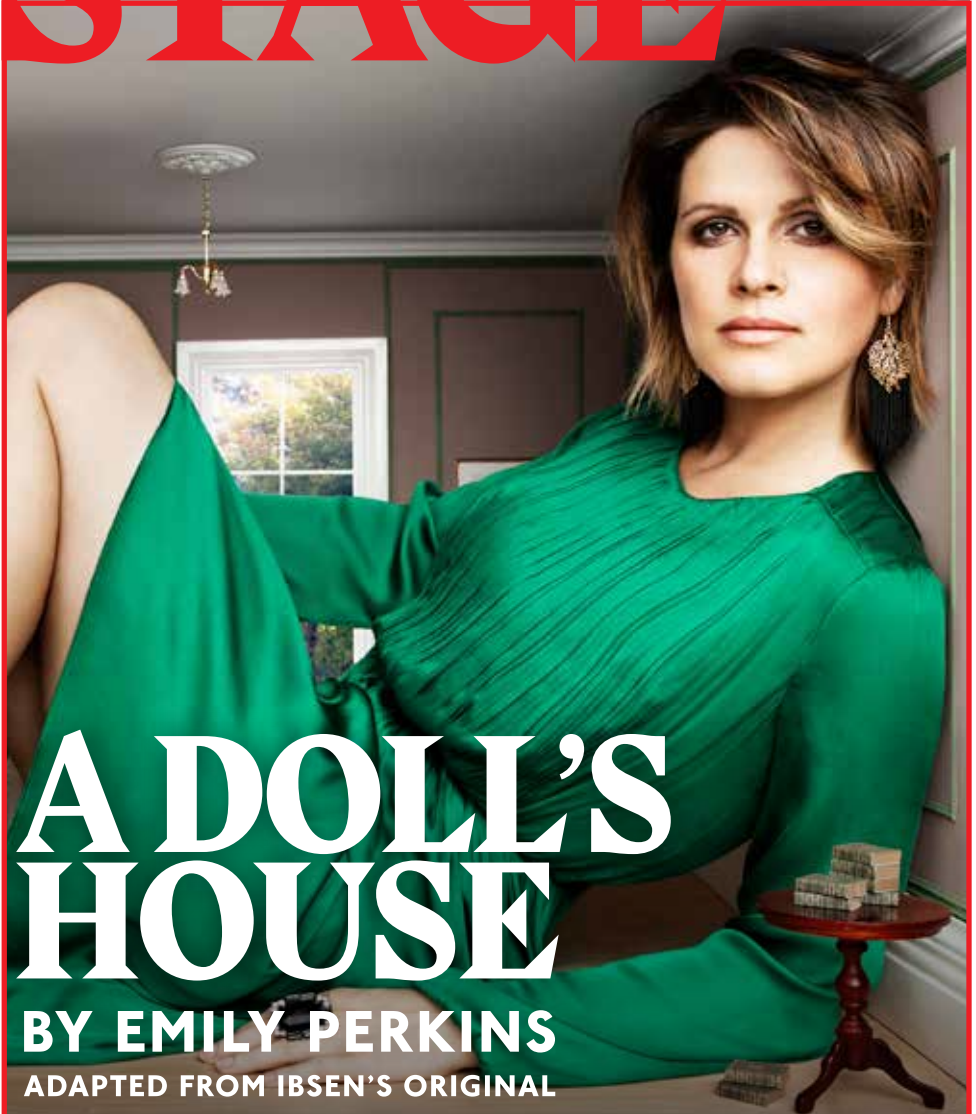


AUCKLAND  
THEATRE  
COMPANY

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Apr 2015

# ON— STAGE



## A DOLL'S HOUSE

BY EMILY PERKINS

ADAPTED FROM IBSEN'S ORIGINAL

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# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Colin McColl

Henrik Ibsen is widely regarded as the most influential playwright after Shakespeare, yet performances of his work are rare in New Zealand. Why is this? Perhaps it has something to do with translation. Here we tend to rely on English translations of the original Norwegian plays. But the English have done Ibsen a great disservice, keeping his work corralled in a nineteenth century, old fashioned idiom. However adept the English translations are, they still don't sound right to our Kiwi ears.

The English seem to disregard the big, bold, courageous, erotic, insightful radical that Ibsen always was. He was the master of modern theatre. What is so revolutionary about his mature work is that, for the first time, the theatre-going public were seeing people up on stage who looked and sounded like them. Prior to Ibsen there was a heightened way of acting and speaking onstage. But Ibsen's characters seemed as if they were real. To this day, in Europe and Scandinavia, it is rare to see a production of an Ibsen play that isn't presented in an absolutely contemporary way, including updating the language. In doing so they are honouring Ibsen's intention of there being no barrier of understanding between actors and audience.

That's why I was interested in commissioning a New Zealand writer to come up with a contemporary and unapologetic Kiwi response to *A Doll's House*. Emily Perkins is the perfect person for the job. Emily is not known as a playwright (in fact this is her first play!) but like Ibsen, she began her career in the theatre and her writing, particularly *Not Her Real Name* and *Novel About My Wife* shows she is sensitive and attuned to the psychology of relationships, as well as the joys and irritations of modern family life. She hasn't slavishly followed Ibsen's plot, but she has been serious and scrupulous about following the spirit and intent of his work. It's a remarkable achievement and it's been a great pleasure for the cast and creatives to engage with her on this absorbing work. So, huge thanks to Emily and to ATC Literary Manager, Philippa Campbell, who has nursed this playscript over many months. Thanks to the many actors who workshopped the development of this play; to my stellar creative team - Tony Rabbit, Nic Smillie and John Gibson - and to this production's fabulous and committed cast. Special thanks too to Madeleine, Zach, Emily and Cassidy, who are making their ATC mainstage debut with this production.

## CAST

Nora Helmer – LAUREL DEVENIE  
Theo Helmer – DAMIEN AVERY  
Christine Linde – NICOLA KAWANA  
Aidan – PAUL GLOVER  
Gerry – PETER ELLIOTT  
Billy – ZACHARY COX / CASSIDY SCOONES  
Bee – MADELEINE WALKER / EMILY ARCHER

## CREATIVE

Director – COLIN McCOLL  
Dramaturg – PHILIPPA CAMPBELL  
Set Designer & Lighting Designer – TONY RABBIT  
Sound Designer – JOHN GIBSON  
Costume Designer – NIC SMILLIE

## PRODUCTION

Production Manager – ANDREW MALMO  
Acting Company Manager – ELAINE WALSH  
Technical Manager – KATE BURTON  
Stage Manager – ELIZA JOSEPHSON-RUTTER  
Chaperone – VIRGINIA FRANKOVICH  
Technical Operator – ROCHELLE BOND  
Sound Effects Programmer – THOMAS PRESS  
Props Master – NATASHA PEARL  
Wardrobe Assistant – PENELOPE PRATT  
Set Construction – 2CONSTRUCT  
Production Intern – NICOLE ARROW

AUCKLAND THEATRE COMPANY WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING FOR THEIR HELP WITH THIS PRODUCTION: Anna Julienne, Stephen Lovatt, Cameron Rhodes, Robyn Malcolm, Roy Ward, Brooke Williams, Adam Gardiner, Hera Dunleavy, Kevin Keys, Chelsie Preston-Crayford, Jared Turner, Peter Daube, Carmen Baxter, Louise & Timothy Archer, Carol Brown & Russell Scoones, Sarah McDowall, Rik van Soest, Rachel & John Cox, Karl Maughan, Michael Hurst, Miro McColl, Felicity Letcher and Roger Murray of Main Reactor, Brigitte @ Hue, Maeve Chea @ Beauty Transformers, Maidment Theatre Staff. Pandas Manufactured by Yancheng Changdong Imp & Exp Co., Ltd. China.

*A Doll's House is the second Auckland Theatre Company mainbill production for 2015 and opened on May 2nd at Maidment Theatre. A Doll's House is approximately 100 minutes with no interval. Please remember to switch off all mobile phones, pagers and watch alarms.*



# A DOLL'S HOUSE

BY EMILY PERKINS

ADAPTED FROM IBSEN'S ORIGINAL

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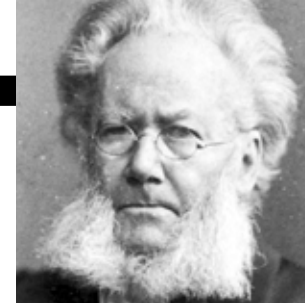
# SYNOPSIS

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Nora and Theo Helmer are a lovely young couple, idealistic, hard-working, and family-oriented: they have two small children, an ecologically sustainable house, and Theo is on the verge of confirming his first major building contract. When their old friend Christine shows up in need, the Helmers are in a position to offer support. But Nora has a secret - one she has been keeping from Theo for several years. Over the course of the three-day Christmas break,

the appearance of another face from the past forces a series of revelations beyond what even Nora knows to be true. The Helmers' relationships with neighbours, colleagues, and possibly their children, may be in jeopardy.

Where to seek safety, where to take risks, and whether romantic love can truly provide shelter from the storm are some of the questions at the heart of this contemporary drama.



## HENRIK IBSEN

*Playwright (1828–1906)*

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Henrik Ibsen was born on March 20, 1828, in Skien, Norway. In 1862, he was exiled to Italy, where he wrote the tragedy *Brand*. In 1868, Ibsen moved to Germany, where he wrote one of his most famous works: the play *A Doll's House*. In 1890, he wrote *Hedda Gabler*, creating one of theatre's most notorious characters. By 1891, Ibsen had returned to Norway a literary hero. He died on May 23, 1906, in Oslo, Norway.

As a child, Henrik Ibsen showed little sign of the theatrical genius he would become. He grew up in the small Norwegian coastal town of Skien as the oldest of five children born to Knud and Marichen Ibsen. His father was a successful merchant and his mother painted, played the piano and loved to go to the theatre. Ibsen himself expressed an interest in becoming an artist as well.

The family was thrown into poverty when Ibsen was 8 because of problems with his father's business. Nearly all traces of their previous affluence had to be sold off to cover debts, and the family moved to a rundown farm near town. There Ibsen spent much of his time

reading, painting and performing magic tricks.

At 15, Ibsen stopped school and went to work. He landed a position as an apprentice in an apothecary in Grimstad. Ibsen worked there for six years, using his limited free time to write poetry and paint. In 1849, he wrote his first play *Catilina*, a drama written in verse modeled after one of his great influences, William Shakespeare.

Ibsen moved to Christiania (later known as Oslo) in 1850 to prepare for university examinations to study at the University of Christiania. Living in the capital, he made friends with other writers and artistic types. One of these friends, Ole Schulerud, paid for the publication of Ibsen's first play *Catilina*, which failed to get much notice.

The following year, Ibsen had a fateful encounter with violinist and theatre manager Ole Bull. Bull liked Ibsen and offered him a job as a writer and manager for the Norwegian Theatre in Bergen. The position proved to be an intense tutorial in all things theatrical and

even included traveling abroad to learn more about his craft. In 1857, Ibsen returned to Christiania to run another theatre there. This proved to be a frustrating venture for him, with others claiming that he mismanaged the theatre and calling for his ouster. Despite his difficulties, Ibsen found time to write *Love's Comedy*, a satirical look at marriage, in 1862.

Ibsen left Norway in 1862, eventually settling in Italy for a time. There he wrote *Brand*, a five-act tragedy about a clergyman whose feverish devotion to his faith costs him his family and ultimately his life in 1865. The play made him famous in Scandinavia. Two years later, Ibsen created one of his masterworks, *Peer Gynt*. A modern take on Greek epics of the past, the verse play follows the title character on a quest.

In 1868, Ibsen moved to Germany. During his time there, he saw his social drama *The Pillars of Society* first performed in Munich. The play helped launch his career and was soon followed up by one of his most famous works, *A Doll's House*. This 1879 play set tongues a-wagging throughout Europe for exploration of Nora's struggle with the traditional roles of wife and mother and her own need for self-exploration. Once again, Ibsen had questioned the accepted social practices of the times, surprising his audiences and stirring up debate. Around this time, he returned to Rome.

His next work, 1881's *Ghosts*, stirred up even more controversy by

tackling such topics as incest and venereal disease. The outcry was so strong that the play wasn't performed widely until two years later. His next work, *An Enemy of the People*, showed one man in conflict with his community. Some critics say it was Ibsen's response to the backlash he received for *Ghosts*. Ibsen wrote *The Lady From the Sea* (1888) and then soon headed back to Norway, where he would spend the remainder of his years. One of his most famous works was to follow, with *Hedda Gabler* in 1890.

In 1891, Ibsen returned to Norway as a literary hero. He may have left as a frustrated artist, but he came back as internationally known playwright. His later works seem to have a more self-reflective quality with mature lead characters looking back and living with the consequences of their earlier life choices. In 1900, Ibsen had a series of strokes that left him unable to write. He managed to live for several more years, but he was not fully present during much of this time. When Ibsen died in 1906 his last words were "To the contrary!" in Norwegian.

[www.biography.com](http://www.biography.com)

## CAST



### LAUREL DEVENIE

(Nora)

Laurel Devenie is a graduate of Toi Whakaari: The NZ Drama School. She has worked with Downstage Theatre (*Flagons And Foxtrots, The Graduate, Othello*), Capital E: National Theatre For Children (*Stealing Games*), Peripeteia Theatre Company (*The Tempest, The Three Sisters*) and Auckland Theatre Company (*The Importance Of Being Earnest, A Midsummer Night's Dream, On The Upside Down Of The World*). Last year she performed *On The Upside Down Of The World* at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival with ATC as part of the New Zealand at Edinburgh contingent.

Laurel has also directed works for Northland Youth Theatre (*The Party, Thinning, Quarry, Odyssey, Empty City*), Auckland Theatre Company (*Thinning, 1001 Mirrors, Giant Teeth*), Tapac, Prayas and Unitec. In 2011 she trained in physical performance and theatre making at The John Bolton Theatre School. She is also Co-director of a theatre collective called Company of Giants (*Odyssey, Giant Teeth, The Owl And The Pusycat*).

## PETER ELLIOTT

(Gerry)



Peter's professional career began in Christchurch at the Court Theatre in 1981. Plays include *The Seagull*, *Pravda*, *Cloud Nine*, *Macbeth*, *Glass Menagerie* and *Torch Song Trilogy*. In a 35 year career he has also worked at The Mercury Theatre, Downstage, Fortune, Auckland Theatre Company, Melbourne Theatre Co and Silo Theatre.

Works for ATC include *Equus*, *Art*, *The Tutor*, *God Of Carnage*, *The Bach*, *The Graduate*, *Noises Off*, *Take A Chance On Me* and *Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead*. For Silo Theatre - *When The Rain*

*Stops Falling*, *Rabbit*, *Ruben Guthrie*, and *The Threepenny Opera*.

Peter directed *The Scene* and *Thom Pain* for Silo Theatre and most recently, *Kings Of The Gym* for ATC.

He has national awards for acting and presenting. He wrote and presented the documentaries *Jungle Rain* and *Revealing Gallipoli*, and presented *Primeval Nz* for Natural History Unit and *Captain's Log* and *Art Of The Architect* series for TV One.

Peter is a proud member of Actors Equity New Zealand.

## DAMIEN AVERY

(Theo)

Theo Helmer in Emily Perkin's version of *A Doll's House* is Damien's second appearance for Auckland Theatre Company's main bill, his first being the hapless victim Leo Irving in *In The Next Room (Or The Vibrator Play)* in 2012.

In between Damien has been traversing the country for theatre and screen work, both here in Auckland and for The Court Theatre in Christchurch, with a tour to China thrown in for good measure. His recent theatre credits

include *One Man Two Guvnors*, *Wild Bees*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Slapdash Assassin*, *The Mikado*, *Postal* and *Snap!* As well as some screen work on *Field Punishment No.1* and *Hillary*.

Damien is thrilled to be working on this re-imagined classic with such a wonderfully talented cast and crew.

Damien is a proud member of New Zealand Actors Equity.



## NICOLA KAWANA

(Christine)

Nicola has worked as an actress for over 25 years. In that time she has graduated from Toi Whakaari / NZ Drama School, won a Chapman Tripp award for her role in Gary Henderson's *Mo And Jess Kill Suzie*, been nominated for best actress at the telly awards for her work on *Jacksons Wharf*, toured the entire length of the country performing school shows, toured overseas in Witi Ihimaera's *Woman Far Walking*, been blown up on *Shortland Street* as its

then CEO, snogged Martin Clunes on Bethells beach in *The Man Who Lost His Head*, worn Angelina Jolie's sound sock, and been stabbed by Temuera Morrison when playing his wife in the film *Fresh Meat*. Nicola's many roles include playing a chicken, a drag queen, Lady Macbeth, an Auschwitz survivor, and most recently a pill popping drunk in Jess Sayer's *Fix* at Basement theatre.

She is also a member of NZ Actors Equity and a UNICEF global parent.



## PAUL GLOVER

(Aidan)

Paul Glover has been a regular face in film, television and on stage since the early 90s. He started his Film career in cult horror film *The Ugly*. Other credits include *The Fall Guys* and *The Locals*. His role as a skinhead, Terry, in film *Snakeskin* earned him a finalist nomination in the NZ Film Awards, as did playing Danny in the film *Fracture*. Paul also starred as Detective Sergeant Paul Knox in award winning feature *Out Of The Blue* based on the true story of the Aramoana massacre.

Years after playing Dylan Preston in *Shortland Street*, Paul now returns to SPP to work with an incurably funny and talented lot of actors in *800 Words*. Not afraid of dirt or blood, Paul kept his clothes on, but got beaten up and covered in blood (a lot) as Salvius in the epic TV series *Spartacus: Vengeance*.

Stage highlights have included playing Dr Bruce Flaherty in *Blue Orange*, and working with Amanda Rees

in the wonderful children's show *The Owl And The Pussycat...* as Owl.

More recently Paul toured 2011-2013 in the acclaimed play *Beautiful Losers*. Last year he took a leap of faith when he was asked to play Richard and sing (debut) on stage with the formidably talented cast of the Kila Kokonut Krew created musical *The Factory*, a show which moved many audiences to ovation around Australia and at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2014.

Paul has also enjoyed working on various productions with ATC over the years including *Julius Caesar*, *In The Next Room (Or The Vibrator Play)*, *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* and is relishing his latest role as Aidan working with Colin alongside the fantastic cast of *A Doll's House...* he loves Emily's adaptation!

In his spare time Paul has also managed to hold onto the most challenging role yet, in an unscripted improvisation called *Life* playing 'Dad'.

## MADELEINE WALKER

(Bee)



Madeleine is 8 years old and was born in Chiswick, London. She has won numerous awards in Speech and Drama, appeared in a recent TV ad and was invited to perform in costume last year at the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the South Auckland Performing Arts Festival. Madeleine is also a talented singer preparing for her Grade 4 exam later this year. She won her first vocal festival championship at the age of 5. Over the past three years, she has won the Under-10 championships at the Hamilton, Te Awamutu and South Auckland vocal festivals.

Dancing is another passion of Madeleine's. Last year she passed both her Tap Level 3 exam and Ballet Grade

2 Classical exam with distinction. Madeleine is also learning both piano and violin by the Suzuki method and is a cheerleader with the All Star Cheerleaders based in Pukekohe.

This production is not Madeleine's first. Last year she was cast as Ramona in Papakura Theatre Company's *Whistle Down the Wind*, for which she won an award nomination, and later this year will take the lead role of Annie in *Annie Jr* to be performed in Pukekohe. As a 3-year-old in London she took part in *Annie Jr* and has appeared several times in various productions for the Majors 'n' Minors Music Studio in South Auckland.

## EMILY ARCHER

(Bee)

Emily is 7 years old. She has participated in performance.net classes and performed in two of their annual productions. She has also participated in Acting for Screen workshops run by LBF Kids and Teens talent company. She is currently studying for her Grade 1 violin exam in May and has performed with

the orchestra in two Majors n' Minors annual music concerts. She has also appeared in TV commercials and done a number of commercial stills modelling and runway shows.

Emily is a competitive horse rider and swimmer.





## ZACHARY COX

*(Billy)*

Zach is 7 years old. A keen drama enthusiast, Zach has participated in Acting for Screen workshops run by the LBF Kids and Teens talent company as well as Artz on Show workshops, a Holiday Drama programme.

Zach played Astynax, the doomed

son of Hector in *Trojan Women*, performed by MARVELLOUS at Auckland Theatre Company's studios in 2013.

Zach is a purple belt in karate and enjoys horse riding, Minecraft and climbing trees.

## CASSIDY SCOONES

*(Billy)*

Cassidy Scoones is six; he has a brother Rafe who is eight and a greyhound called Boris. He has participated in Clare Battersby's creative dance classes and productions at TAPAC since he was three years old. Cassidy's first professional performance was as 'boy' in the site specific work *Tuna Mau* as part of the Oceanic Performance Biennale (2013).

Besides dancing, he enjoys football, aikido, cycling and playing the piano. Cassidy attends Bayfield Primary School.



# CREATIVE TEAM



## EMILY PERKINS

*Playwright*

Emily Perkins is the author of five books, including *Not Her Real Name*, *Novel About My Wife* and *The Forrests*. She studied drama at Toi Whakaari and creative writing at Victoria University of Wellington and the University of Auckland. Her books have won awards in Aotearoa, the US and UK, and in 2011 she was made an Arts Laureate by the Arts Foundation of New Zealand. Emily lives in Wellington, where she convenes the MA in fiction writing at Victoria University's International Institute of Modern Letters. This adaptation of *A Doll's House* is her first play. She has relished the opportunity Auckland Theatre Company has given her to respond to Ibsen's classic.

Emily would like to thank: Colin McColl, Philippa Campbell, Tony Rabbit, Eliza Josephson-Rutter, all at ATC, the crew and cast of this production and those involved in earlier readings and workshops of this play: Laurel Devenie, Damien Avery, Paul Glover, Peter Elliott, Nicole Kawana, Cassidy Scoones, Carmen Baxter, Chelsie Preston-Crayford, Jared Turner, Peter Daube, Hera Dunleavy, Brooke Williams, Adam Gardiner, Kevin Keys, Anna Julienne, Stephen Lovatt, Robyn Malcolm, Cameron Rhodes and Roy Ward.





## COLIN McCOLL

Director

Colin has directed Ibsen plays for the Norwegian National Theatre and the Dutch National Theatre, as well as leading New Zealand and Australian theatre companies, and is the only New Zealand director to be invited to present his work at the official Edinburgh Festival. His production of *Hedda Gabler* played there to great acclaim in 1990 and was also presented at the Ibsen Festival in Oslo, the Covent Garden Festival in London, and the 1991 Sydney Festival. Colin has also won Best Director at the Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards several times — including for his Circa Theatre production of *A Doll's House*.

His many productions for Auckland Theatre Company include: *Anne Boleyn*, *Midnight In Moscow*, *Lord Of The Flies*, *Awatea*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *In The Next Room (Or The Vibrator Play)*, *Calendar Girls*, *On The Upside Down Of The World*, *Mary Stuart*, *August: Osage County*, *The Pohutukawa Tree*,

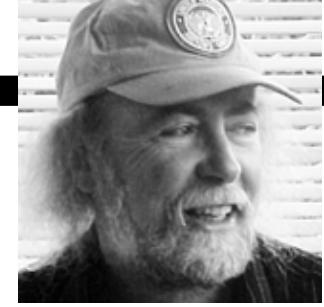
*Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*, *The Female Of The Species*, *Where We Once Belonged*, *End Of The Rainbow*, *The Crucible*, *Hatch Or The Plight Of The Penguins*, *Doubt*, *Disgrace*, *The Duchess Of Malfi*, *Equus*, *Goldie*, *Waiting For Godot*, *Serial Killers*, *The Seagull*, *Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Uncle Vanya*.

Opera directing credits include *Quartet* (New Zealand International Arts Festival 2004), *La Boheme* (Wellington City Opera), *The Italian Girl In Algiers*, *The Marriage Of Figaro* and *The Prodigal Child* for the NBR New Zealand Opera. In 2009 he remounted his production of *The Italian Girl In Algiers* for the Scottish Opera.

In November 2007, Colin was honoured for his artistic achievements and excellence at the eighth annual Arts Foundation of New Zealand Laureate Awards and was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in June 2010.

## TONY RABBIT

Set and Lighting Designer



Tony Rabbit has designed sets and/or lighting for theatre, opera, television and film and even, according to one reporter, the radio.

His work was last seen by Auckland Theatre Company audiences in *A Midsummer Night's*

*Dream*, *Awatea*, *On The Upside-Down Of The World*, *The Importance Of Being Earnest*, *The Pohutukawa Tree*, *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*, *Where We Once Belonged*, *End Of The Rainbow*, *Hatch Or The Plight Of The Penguins*, *Disgrace* and *The Duchess Of Malfi*.

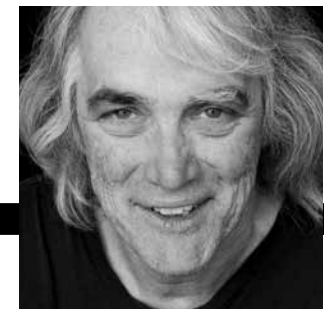
## JOHN GIBSON

Sound Designer and Composer

John Gibson has been composing original music for New Zealand theatre, film, dance and television since 1980. During that time he has composed over 100 scores and sound designs for theatre. In 2008 he received a Qantas Film and Television award for his score for Vincent Ward's film *Rain Of The Children*. In 2013 he composed an eight speaker sound design for *360: A Theatre Of Recollections* and has performed in Edinburgh in a comedy he wrote and directed called *Gordon Six Pence He Is Music*.

Previous works for Auckland Theatre Company include:

*The Good Soul of Szechuan*, *Fallen Angels*, *Awatea*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *In The Next Room (Or The Vibrator Play)*, *On The Upside Down Of The World*, *Poor Boy*, *The Wasteland*, *Calendar Girls*, *Horseplay*, *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* and *Chicago*.





## NIC SMILLIE

Costume Designer

Nic Smillie has a Bachelor of Design in Textiles and has worked in theatre, film and television as a costume designer for the past thirteen years. Designs for Auckland Theatre Company include: *Midnight In Moscow*, *Awatea*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Motor Camp*, *Calendar Girls*, *Cabaret*, *August: Osage County*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *The Pohutukawa Tree*, *The Wife Who Spoke Japanese In Her Sleep*, *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* and *Where We Once Belonged*.

Nic has also costumed various, mainly Wellington-based, theatre projects which include *Sex Drive*, *Rita And Douglas* and *Le Sud* (Wanaka Festival of Colour), *The Motor Camp*, *King And Country*, *Top Girls*, *Cabaret*, *Dracula*, *Private Lives*, *Sweeney Todd* and *Drawer Of Knives*.

Winner of the Air New Zealand Screen Award for Contribution to Design for the television series *The Insider's Guide To Love*, Nic has also designed costumes for *Rage*, *Tangiwai*, *Fish Skin Suit* and *Aftershock* (telefeatures) and *The Insider's Guide To Happiness*, *Seven Periods With Mr Gormsby*, *The Hothouse* and *Time Trackers* (television series). Her operatic designs include *Quartet* and *The Italian Girl In Algiers*. For film her works include *Fresh Meat*, *Turangawaewae* and *Stickmen*.

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# THE LAST TABOO?

By Julia Llewellyn Smith

## Men do it all the time, so why do we still judge women who walk out of the family home so harshly?

Rebecca Bunting is excited about the weekend. She's flying from London to Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, where a little boy will be waiting to greet her at the airport.

'It's his fourth birthday,' she says, smiling. 'I haven't seen him for three months and I can't wait to see how much he's grown, how much he's learnt.' From the way she's talking you'd imagine Rebecca is going to visit a nephew or a friend's child. Instead, this tall, attractive 28-year-old from London is going to spend a long weekend with her son, a son whom she left two years ago when she walked away from him and her husband, and with whom she has no plans to live permanently again.

'He has a very good father and grandmother. I feel he's better off living with them than with me,' she says calmly. 'If my instinct was otherwise he'd be with me, but I just can't be sure that that would work.' Drinking green tea in the bar of a London hotel, Rebecca comes across as a confident and focused young woman. An English teacher, she now lives in Brighton and when we meet she's just been shopping for a dress to wear on a theatre outing.

Yet public perception of women like Rebecca, who have chosen to live away from their children, is that they are at some level inadequate. In a society where maternal love is revered, anyone who fails to put their children before herself is seen as unnatural. Whispers follow: 'What's wrong with her? I could never do that.' Sarah Hart is the co-chairwoman of Match, a charity for mothers who don't live with their children, and author of *A Mother Apart*, a book for the 200,000 or so British women estimated to be in this situation. She says that there is still a huge discrepancy in how we view mothers not living with their children, as opposed to fathers. 'With men we acknowledge it's very painful for them to be separated from their kids but that this is just how things work out. But when a woman does it our judgment is unforgiving,' she says. 'The assumption is that she must have done something wrong, that in some way she must be unfit.'

Fiction is full of admonitory stories about women who break this taboo. Anna Karenina leaves her husband and son to run off with another man, only to end up

committing suicide. The 1970s hit film *Krāmer vs Krāmer* told of a middle-class woman, played by Meryl Streep, abandoning her young son to 'find herself' and discovering on her return that the child no longer wants her. Tony Parsons told a similar story in his bestselling novel *Man and Boy*, based on his experience of his wife, the writer Julie Burchill, leaving him and their five-year-old son, Bobby. Burchill described public attacks on her as 'a load of pompous cant, basically. Men do it all the time.' None the less, 30 years later she and Bobby are still estranged. Equally vilified was Frances Shand Kydd who in the late 1960s left her husband, Earl Spencer, and four children for another man. Her young daughter, the future Diana, Princess of Wales, always made it clear she had been forever scarred by the abandonment.

History largely chose to ignore the fact that Shand Kydd had in fact fought and lost a vicious custody battle, an anomaly at a time when courts virtually always awarded custody to mothers. But the Children Act of 1989 stipulated that justice must be 'gender neutral' and not assume the mother was always the primary carer.

This, combined with increasing numbers of women becoming breadwinners and more and more men 'house husbands', has led to a sudden, steep rise in women living away from their children. Today the Child Support Agency has 55,000 women on its list of absentee parents required to pay maintenance, about five per cent of its caseload.

Although no legal arrangement

is in place, Rebecca Bunting sends money monthly to support her son. She was just 23 and a drama student in London when she became accidentally pregnant. 'I'd never dreamed about marriage or children but I surprised myself and my friends by feeling really positive about it,' she says. Her boyfriend found work in his home town of Tallinn so, seven months pregnant, she moved there and married him.

Almost immediately, however, their relationship disintegrated. 'Very quickly we lost any fibre of the love we'd once had for each other.' Rebecca wanted to return to London but was too pregnant to fly. She ended up giving birth by caesarean section in a hospital where none of the staff spoke English.

'My husband was working away from home, I was living with my mother-in-law, a London girl in a small town no one had heard of, where it was always cold and dark. I thought, "How has this become my life?"' She crosses her arms as if cradling a baby. 'No one spoke my language and I was with this child I had to feed and care for, 24 hours a day, for ever. It was hard to feel much joy.'

In such alien surroundings Rebecca found it impossible to fall in love with her baby. 'I found the routine of being a mother deeply unfulfilling. With the bond other mothers seem to have it might have been bearable, but I just couldn't feel it in me. My son was part of me, I grew him, I breastfed him for a year, but that connection just wasn't there and that was so difficult to live with.'

Only on occasional trips to London did Rebecca 'feel the fog lifting'. So when her son was two she decided to return for a long stay while he remained with his father and grandmother.

'Initially, we agreed it would just be for the summer but I think I knew I might not return,' she says. This suspicion was quickly confirmed. 'As soon as I got home I just felt so full of life. I felt something had returned, and it was me.' It sounds as if Rebecca had a severe case of postnatal depression. She nods. 'If I'd been in England that might have been addressed and I might have thought, "Is there something I can do about not bonding with my baby?" But in the circumstances my remedy was just to leave.'

She shrugs. 'I had a bad time but women give birth in terrible places – in Iraq – and they cope and form a bond with their children. Even back in England, where I felt so much happier, I wasn't sure that I would feel 100 per cent with my son there. I just couldn't guarantee stability.'

Despite her resolute air now, for a long while Rebecca was torn with self-doubt. 'I thought, "What the hell is happening? I had a child and I've left. People don't do this. I must be a terrible person." I wouldn't say I was in turmoil but I couldn't quite balance myself. I had to sit down and say, "This is who I am." In the end I had to think what was more damaging: me leaving or my son being with a mother who wasn't a happy version of herself.' She adds that her own mother was not particularly maternal. 'Perhaps if she

had been, things would be different, but as it is I know what it is to live with a mother who doesn't take to it naturally and it's not very nice.'

Two years on Rebecca talks to her son regularly and aims to see him every three months. 'It's lovely now; I enjoy him and learning about him. I see having him as a wonderful thing in my life and I'm looking forward to the future of it.' Are maternal feelings beginning to develop? 'We have a unique mother and son relationship,' she says firmly, avoiding the question.

Sarah Hart stresses that women like Rebecca who actively chose to leave their children are the exception rather than the rule. Three quarters of the women she counsels may have walked out, but they intended their absence only to be temporary.

'They are suffering terrible stress at home and leave in a hurry, thinking they will come back soon to fetch the children and then they find out with horror that this is not so easy.'

Angela Harper, 50, who lives near Glasgow, walked out on her three sons, then 15, 13 and nine, 10 years ago, after 16 years in an unhappy marriage.

'I stayed all that time for the children's sake, but in the end I couldn't do it anymore,' she says. 'I ran away thinking that this would jolt my husband into seeing how miserable I was and we could sit and talk, but then everything spiralled out of control.'

Instead, her husband applied for sole custody of the children. Largely because Angela had left the family

home, he won. 'I was an absolute mess but I never, ever expected to lose my children. I was in unbearable pain.'

Because she had left, few sympathised with her. 'People who'd known me before understood the kids were my life. But people I met later were so harsh. Once they found out I'd left my kids they didn't call me back, they never went out for coffee with me again, they said, "Over my dead body would I leave my children." They assumed it must be crime, drink or drugs related; they didn't realise life was so bad. My doctor saw what a state I was in but he just said, "You should have thought of that before you left." It was such a lonely place to be.'

Sarah Hart says that, stripped of their main role as mother, many of her clients are suicidal. 'Their entire previous identity suddenly vanishes. They're asking themselves, "If I'm not a mother, then who am I? How can I carry on living?"'

Sally Smyth, 35, from Croydon, Surrey, has not lived with her three children, aged eight, six and five, for two years. In desperation, she sent them to live for what she thought would just be a couple of months with her ex-husband when she found herself under intolerable pressure as a single mother. Now, however, he has custody and she can only visit occasionally.

'I have to avoid public transport because the sight of mothers and their children makes me feel sick,' she says, near to tears. 'If something to do with children comes on television I have to leave the house.

It doesn't get better. You think you're coping and then you visit the children and it just hits you. In some ways it would be easier if I just never saw them again, but of course I couldn't do that because it would be so devastating for them.'

However understandable their motives, all the women I spoke to were tortured with guilt about the effect their actions would have on their children. Even Rebecca, who is adamant she made the right decision, has found it impossible to resume her former, carefree existence.

'There was no way I could just revert to the lifestyle of a 23-year-old. I had a sense that since I had done this thing I needed to do something with my life, to set a good example, to justify living apart from my child.'

Among other things, she is now involved with the Green Party and volunteers as a speech and language therapist.

'I felt so trapped before, and now I really value being able to choose. I've regained my freedom but I want to contribute it to bigger causes.'

She is adamant she will never have another child, both out of respect to the son she already has and because she is convinced she was not meant to be a mother. Meanwhile, her friends are starting to settle down.

'Some of them can't wait to have babies. Great, good for them.' She pauses. 'There's a hype about getting married and having a baby, but it wasn't for me. I want to do what I want to do and my life is going to be about other things.'

# ASB WATERFRONT THEATRE



The Moana Pacific Fisheries building being dismantled (as seen from the ASB North Wharf building).

## NOVEMBER 2014

We are five months into the construction of the ASB Waterfront Theatre and the progress we have seen already is phenomenal. To recap, the Moana Pacific Fisheries building was dismantled late last year and by January the site was completely cleared. Throughout February and March the pilings were placed, some going as far as 18 metres into the ground, and work on the foundations began. Currently, the foundations are around 60% complete and the team are finishing up the under slab drainage.

As of late March, we began to see vertical progress as the structural steel work got underway. The first phase of this, the inner section of the fly tower, is now complete and the second section will be underway shortly. The blockwork and concrete walls for the ground floor are also under construction this month.



The view from Madden Street once the site was cleared.

## JANUARY 2015



The ASB Waterfront Theatre foundations being laid (as seen from the corner of Madden Street and Te Wero Lane).

## MARCH 2015

We are running to schedule looking towards our late 2016 opening date and as such our creative team are already beginning to brainstorm ideas for our inaugural show. While this is an extremely exciting time for the company and our loyal (and patient) audiences it is important to note we aren't over the finish line yet. While we have raised the \$35 million needed to complete the construction phase of the project we still need an additional \$1 million in order to cover the fit out items and deliver the project in its entirety.

If you are interested in donating to this world-class facility and helping us finish our much needed home then we urge you to do so now. We have a number of donation options available and truly appreciate any and all help given. For more information on the project or how to give please visit our website [www.asbwaterfronttheatre.co.nz](http://www.asbwaterfronttheatre.co.nz)



The commencement of the theatre auditorium proscenium arch and fly tower (as seen from the corner of Madden Street and Te Wero Lane).

## APRIL 2015

### THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS OF THE ASB WATERFRONT THEATRE



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To find out more or for information on how to donate visit [www.asbwaterfronttheatre.co.nz](http://www.asbwaterfronttheatre.co.nz) or call **09 309 0390**

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The Founders Club is a group of highly committed people who are passionate about securing this new theatre for Auckland. In recognition of their investment in this visionary project, members are afforded:

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For more information on the project, or to make a donation, please visit [www.asbwaterfronttheatre.co.nz](http://www.asbwaterfronttheatre.co.nz)



We would be delighted to welcome you into this select group of supporters playing a vital role in ensuring the success of this project. If you are interested, please contact Linden Tierney on 09 309 0390 ext. 272, [linden@atc.co.nz](mailto:linden@atc.co.nz).

The Waterfront Theatre Trust is a registered charity and donations are eligible for a tax rebate. Donations can be paid in installments over a period of time to assist financial management or to maximise tax effectiveness.

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# WHAT'S ON IN THEATRES AROUND THE COUNTRY?



## ENLIGHTENMENT

by Shelagh Stephenson

Maidment Theatre

28 May - 20 June

Five months since the disappearance of their back-packer son, Lia and Nick are unsure who to turn to, or even whether he's alive or dead. They frantically seek clues, comfort and strength. Out of the blue, their lost son seemingly materialises. But is he the real thing? As the couple seek enlightenment, a dark truth emerges which challenges their world view and plays on every parent's deepest fear. Intense, intelligent, and shot through with humour, this is contemporary theatre at its best.

Auckland Theatre Company



## EIGHT GIGABYTES OF HARDCORE PORNOGRAPHY

by Declan Greene

Q Theatre - Loft

18 June - 11 July

He's addicted to porn. She's addicted to spending. She's self-conscious about her breasts. And so is he. A tale of desperation and the lengths we'll go to find satisfaction, Australian theatre-maker Declan Greene uses his signature wit to create a wincingly hilarious and awkwardly recognisable portrait of contemporary life crisis.

Silo Theatre | Auckland



## A SERVANT OF TWO MASTERS

by Carlo Goldini

Circa

2 - 30 May

Goldoni's much-loved comic classic is a masterpiece starring a wily servant whose cheeky, inventive trickery gets the best of his masters, in a merry mix-up of mayhem and mistaken identity. Truffaldino, the scheming and perpetually hungry servant, concocts a zany scheme to double his wages (and his meals) by simultaneously serving two masters - the lovelorn Beatrice (disguised as a man) and her lost lover Florindo.

Circa Theatre | Wellington



## GOLF: A LOVE STORY

by Roger Hall

Centrepoint Theatre

11 April - 23 May

No matter how badly you play, it's always possible to get worse. Despite spending most of his retirement on the golf course, Bill's days of early mornings, lessons from an over-priced South African, weekly rounds with pompous brother-in-laws, and copious amounts of painkillers are over... because Bill needs a new knee. But before his operation, Bill is determined to break a hundred, something he has never done before, and is not likely to do again.

Centrepoint Theatre | Palmerston North



## CONSTELLATIONS

by Nick Payne

Court One

2 - 16 May

Boy (an easy going bee-keeper) meets Girl (a sophisticated quantum physicist) and so begins a deeply absorbing romantic journey which explores the infinite possibilities of their relationship, where each path they take shapes an entirely different future.

The Court Theatre | Christchurch

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metromag.co.nz



## MAMIL

by Greg Cooper

Fortune Theatre

2 - 16 May

He's a stressed out, self-medicating, self-loathing arse, killing himself to increase his bank balance while decreasing his golf score. When his business and life fall apart thanks to the global financial crisis, he joins a men's cycling group to relieve stress and get healthy. Ultimately faced with his own mortality, he makes a few startling discoveries in various cracks and crevices. A show that knows no geographical boundaries (it is a universal truth that everyone has an opinion of the MAMIL) this is a sharply comical look at one of the most polarising of species - the Middle Aged Man in Lycra.

Fortune Theatre | Dunedin

## PRODUCTION SUPPLIERS



[www.2construct.co.nz](http://www.2construct.co.nz)



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