

# MARDE HEN PRODUCTIONS

## 'Fish & Chips'

Written and directed by Stephen Lee Rees

An Interview with Mik Horvath & Jane Wilton  
(Norman & Jean Bakewell)

### **How would you summarise your experience during the rehearsals for this new piece of theatre?**

**MIK:** I have to say that I have thoroughly enjoyed the whole rehearsal process – the script, cast and crew are incredible. Whilst we've put in considerable time and effort into the rehearsal process, including many additional line runs in Fresh Ground in Belper (*and obviously with copious tea and cake!*) it's been brilliant fun in playing with all the characters and even after months of rehearsals I'm still laughing now at many of the characters' lines and characterisations that have developed over time. It's been a huge honour to be part of a brand new piece of theatre and it's a great responsibility to ensure that we do it the justice it deserves. With less than a week to go before opening night I'm now ready for an audience and hope they enjoy watching it as much as I've enjoyed working on it.

**JANE:** During rehearsals I've been challenged, I've delved and hopefully studied the text and tried to understand not just mine but all characters. I've made some firm friendships and although at times I've been short on confidence due partly to not being in a play for a long time, I've really embraced the challenge and hope we can all do the new play justice.

### **What is your favourite line in the play?**

**MIK:** That's a difficult one to answer simply because there are so many beautifully written lines for all characters so would have to include a selection:- "*... There's a new leather shop opened up in town. It sells leather goods...*" ('Kenneth Jones') "*Norman, the furthest we've been in ten years is Bognor Regis; and that was due to getting on the wrong pigging bus! Never did reach Cadbury World.*" ('Jean Bakewell') "*... I physically can't put anything else in my mouth today... Maybe a chip butty. Some peas. Bit of fish. Maybe even a pie. Bit of gravy.*" ('Sally Roberts') "*Perhaps we need to think outside the box a little. I mean, what's wrong with a pea fritter?*" ('Norman Bakewell')

**JANE:** It's probably:- "*you know something, Mr. Bakewell, I do love you*" ('Jean Bakewell') because despite all they've both been through, one thing remains constant. I believe Jean is with him not out of duty but out of real love.

### **What's your favourite scene in the play?**

**MIK:** Yet another difficult one to choose as there are so many. If I had to pick one I think I would have to go with one of the few scenes where all 5 characters are involved on set at the same time because my fellow actors are so talented it's a pleasure to be sharing the same stage. Therefore I'll go with scene 7 – this is the last scene of the 1<sup>st</sup> act where 'Norman' gets wound up because of a rival chip shop owner's promotional advert and 'Jean' ends up wearing a rather unusual costume in an attempt by 'Norman' to promote the 'Cod Father'.

**JANE:** My favourite scene could be one of two. It's probably the one where Norman stands 'Jean' up. This scene is really good as it covers so much emotionally and I love the way she opens up to Grayson and appears to have made some decisions yet she doesn't. It covers warmth, memory, loss, dissatisfaction, loyalty and I personally find it challenging yet straight forward to do all at the same time. I really love the ending too, it's beautifully written and I find it again challenging. I like the thought that it looks ended yet leaves so many options.

***As part of the research into this play; Jane and Mik visited the King Street Fish Bar in Belper – the following questions all relate to this 'work experience'...***

### **Were you nervous about going?**

**MIK:** I don't really know why but I was quite on edge about going, maybe because I wasn't sure what to expect when we got there but there was no reason to be nervous because the owner, Alisom, and the other staff were very friendly, welcoming and eager to show us the ropes.

**JANE:** I was nervous as I thought the director may have different visions and obviously that puts pressure on an actor - but in a good way.

### **What did you learn from the experience?**

**MIK:** I think the main lesson learned was how much of an art form it is in running a fish and chip shop and how disciplined and controlled the whole process has to be. It was a totally different outlook in standing behind the counter, it was like a mini-cockpit with all the heating controls for the fryers etc.

**JANE:** Also, there is a definite knack to throwing chips in as if you don't aim correctly you could end up pebble dashed.. In hot oil.. In a vulnerable area of ones body.. I discovered there is indeed an art to fish frying in particular, you don't as I always believed, cover the fish in batter, fling them in oil and hope for the best. There is something most spiritual about setting them free to swim in hot oil and they emerge like the fish we know and love..

### **What did you think about Alisom?**

**MIK:** It was very apparent from the outset that Alisom is so passionate about what he does – he’s friendly, customer focussed and it’s plain to see that he really cares about the quality of the service as well as the food in providing the highest standards for his staff and customers. He was very helpful in showing us the processes involved in making top quality fish and chips, from the peeling and chipping of potatoes to the fish preparation – he even let us coat some fish in batter and put them in the fryers along with the chips and he explained how important it was to regularly check the temperature of the foods with a thermometer – all far more scientific and controlled than I’d imagined.

**JANE:** The thing that really struck me was the coordination and team work required to run a tight ship (pun intended) Also how pristine the facilities were! I found it really useful and interesting as Ali showed us both front of house and behind the scenes. It was a pleasure and advantage of experiencing a slice of life behind a real chip shop counter! Thank you Ali and team.

### **Has the experience been helpful?**

**MIK:** Absolutely! It’s very important in any characterisation to produce something as real and natural as possible to ensure that the actor, fellow actors and audience members alike get the most from each character and the play in general. It’s sometimes not easy to get the opportunity of having hands on experience as part of your research into a particular play or character so this fish and chip shop session was invaluable in fully understanding what they see and do – it’s far more than ‘extra battered bits’ !!

**JANE:** All in all a really worthwhile experience that makes me appreciate the work that Norman & Jean need to put in if they want a fighting chance of staying open.

Book your tickets online at [www.ticketsource.co.uk/mardehenproductions](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/mardehenproductions), call us on 07886017913 or email us at [mardehenproductions@hotmail.com](mailto:mardehenproductions@hotmail.com) to reserve your ticket now.

## **'Fish & Chips'**

On at The Strutts Centre, Belper  
Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> 7:30pm  
(Saturday Matinee 2:30pm)  
Tickets £10.

