

ART IMITATES LIFE

Mental health worker draws on personal experience for challenging emotional role



More than 50 years ago, English playwright Terence Rattigan wrote *The Deep Blue Sea*, as an emotional response to the suicide of a former lover. While homosexuality and attempted suicide were recognized as crimes in Britain during the 1950's, Rattigan's personal experience is clearly evidenced, in the empathy with which he created the tragically brave heroine of Hester Collyer.

Over half a century later, it is lead actor Taimi Allan's own personal experience of mental illness, which brings sensitivity and raw emotion to the portrayal of Hester, in Titirangi Theatre's June production directed by Liz Watkinson.

Faced with the dilemma of being wanted by the man she rejected (Judge Collyer – played by Ian Harvey), and being abandoned by the lover she so passionately adores (ex RAF pilot Freddie Page – played by Paul McIver), Hester is indeed between the devil and the Deep Blue Sea.

“From the first reading of *The Deep Blue Sea*, I knew I had to play Hester Collyer”, says Allan. “My own journey of recovery from mental illness echoes the emotional roller coaster Hester finds herself on. My day job as a Mental Health advisor makes me realise how far we've come in understanding mental illness. However, I feel that our society still has room for improvement, in confronting issues such as emotional impulsivity and suicide without sensationalising, romanticising or over simplifying it”

Allan is no stranger to the stage or screen, but is a new face to New Zealand audiences. Allan's acting career began with her studies of Performance at Flinders University in South Australia, the co-founding of a Adelaide theatre company 'Take the Couch' and significant appearances including the feature film *Look Both Ways*, the TV series *McLeod's Daughters*, and *Theatre Sports Australia™*

“This play is particularly cathartic for me” says Allan. “Rattigan deals tactfully with the emotional issues and reactions surrounding Hester's suicide attempt, rather than relying on graphic scenes of the attempt itself.”

TITIRANGI THEATRE PRESENTS

THE DEEP BLUE SEA

BY TERENCE RATTIGAN DIRECTED BY LIZ WATKINSON

TICKETS
\$20 & \$15
GALA OPENING NIGHT \$25
WEDNESDAYS \$12
SPECIAL \$5 TICKET FOR GOLDCARD HOLDERS

8PM
9TH-20TH JUNE

MATINEES
13TH JUNE 2PM
14TH JUNE 6PM

BOOKINGS AT
TITIRANGI PHARMACY
PHONE 817 7658

TITIRANGI THEATRE
LOPDELL HOUSE TITIRANGI

HUNT & GAUNT DAVID J BROWN REAL ESTATE Glover GeWer THE HARDWARE CAFE



“My family and I struggled with the challenge of my mental distress for many years, until I realised that the key for me, was to learn to connect with the residual strength within myself. With their support, I was eventually able to make the decision to eliminate medication, and re-educate myself not to dwell on the past or worry about the future. The biggest lesson I’ve learnt is to treat my experience as a gift and not an illness and to make considered and deliberate choices in each and every moment”

“I spent most of my life hiding my experience because of the fear of discrimination, and also the stigma that is attached to mental illness. Right now, I’m in a place where I feel that if the disclosure of my experience and recovery can offer hope to someone else, the journey has been worthwhile.” says Allan.

“I am not only the person I am today through surviving the journey, but as a result, the emotions I experience in this role are very real for me.”

Allan works for Mind and Body Consultants Ltd, a provider of advice, peer support, education and training services in the mental health sector. The company is notable not only by its success, but for being owned and operated entirely by people with experience of mental illness.

It is apparent that even in the 1950’s, Rattigan understood the concept of peer support, and the power of shared experience. Through the character of Mr Miller, the disgraced Doctor (played by Brendan Smith), Millers own past offers Hester hope by persuasively advising her to find the courage to live.

The Deep Blue Sea is director Liz Watkinson’s 25th production for Titirangi Theatre, of which she is the President.

“Given an excellent play and the great cast I’m working with, there is nothing more exhilarating for a director”, says Watkinson. “Knowing that two of my actors in particular have had very similar life experiences to the characters they portray, makes directing them challenging, and the emotional intensity riveting to watch.”

The Deep Blue Sea season runs for two weeks at Titirangi Theatre Lopdell House. It is being supported by Mind and Body Consultants as part of their Auckland regional ‘Like Minds, Like Mine’ service aimed at reducing the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness.

9th June - 20th June at 8pm
Sunday 14th June Performance 6pm
MATINEE Saturday 13th June at 2pm

Tickets - \$20 & \$15

\$12 Performances on Wednesdays.

Gold Card Holders \$5 (At selected performances)

Book at Titirangi Pharmacy ph. 817-7658

