

# ***norwich*** magazine

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## **FREE RADICAL**

At Free School Norwich,  
Tania Sidney-Roberts has  
realised a long-cherished  
dream. But do we need it?





A new annual festival at Norwich Cathedral's Hostry creates an informal rep theatre company of professional and amateur actors, singers and production people.

Bernie Sheehan reports

# For the love of it

**E**ven for a man who lists professional acting, radio production, songwriting, DJ-ing, voice-over work and drama tuition on his CV, Stash Kirkbride admits that the 2011 Hostry Festival is a big step up from last year's event.

With executive producer Peter Barrow, Kirkbride has put together an eight-day programme of theatre, music, radio and film involving 60 people. "We've been inspired by people we know and have worked with locally who deserve to be celebrated." Norfolk is a county brimming with 'adventure capital', he says, meaning companies and individuals who share a commitment for creating work of a high standard.

Topping the festival bill are *The Rainmaker*, a romantic comedy set in America, and *Inspector Rufus Rank Investigates*, a specially commissioned radio play by Eve Stebbing (which will be performed by actors in evening dress in front of a 1950s BBC-style microphone with on-stage sound effects). The classical music programme has been coordinated by Roger Rowe of Norfolk & Norwich Chamber Music, and there are critically acclaimed folk and jazz acts, too.

"Our company is made up of working professionals with vast experience, amateurs, and those with little stage experience. It's this vibrant mixture that excites me as director of the festival," says Kirkbride. On the *The Rainmaker* cast list, for example, is Tom Harper, a professional actor who works in London but lives in Norfolk. Bill Ellis, another high-profile actor who appeared in TV's *The Bill* for 10 years, appears with his son, singer-songwriter Chris Ellis, in *Father & Son: Son & Father*, a passion play where the roles of Jesus and God have been played elsewhere by Sam and Timothy West, among other luminaries. "It's very rewarding to see everyone, on and off stage, learning, growing, sharing and turning in work of a standard any company would be proud of. That's the buzz, the challenge and what we're offering all those interested in the arts in Norfolk."

Kirkbride first met Barrow when they were

both working as actors in London in the '90s. "I started in business but my heart was in acting," says Barrow, who came to London from Canada in 1973. "I eventually went to drama school. Later, when I came into a sizeable inheritance on the death of my mother, I decided I wanted to put some of it back into acting and related activities."

The result was the PBSK partnership. Its first production was the Tennessee Williams play, *The Night of the Iguana*, in October 2010. Kirkbride was director-producer and Barrow, as well as putting up the money, played the part of the 97-year-old poet in the play. It was staged in Norwich Cathedral's new Hostry building. "We were the first drama company in at the Hostry – it's a beautiful venue and it was important to us that it was a fresh space with no history," says Kirkbride. "The play and concert were very well received. We got good feedback from everyone who came."

Among the audience was Iain McClay, a partner at Fosters Solicitors, whose daughter Caitlin was performing in one of the lead roles. "He

loved the play, and afterwards he told us that Fosters wanted to sponsor us not just for this year but going forward too." It was a massive boost for the fledgling partnership and Kirkbride is a strong believer in business and the arts working together. "If there's not enough money in the well because of arts cuts, then personally I feel it's the way forward. Of course, it's not a case of either-or – we would love government support! But this way of working frees you up, because you don't have to second-guess what is wanted for the money. Peter is facilitating this freedom. He's an incredibly supportive creative partner. We're able to sidestep blocks, because of his philanthropic investment."

Kirkbride acknowledges that without the support from the outset of Sue Ball, commercial manager at the Hostry, the festival couldn't have gone ahead. "We're very keen to continue working with Stash and bring different things to the Hostry," says Ball. "A lot of people think the cathedral is 'not for them' and wouldn't normally come. We want to welcome in different groups of people, as well as those who come to pray and visitors to the city, to make it as inclusive as possible." She mentions the Total Ensemble theatre project, *All Walks of Life*, which was specially commissioned for the festival and features a cross-section of young people from different backgrounds, some with disabilities or learning difficulties. "We're very pleased with the Hostry Festival. It's something we believe in and exactly what a cathedral should be doing, and I know the Dean and Chapter feel the same."

Kirkbride, who was born in Australia and home-educated in Norfolk, returned to Norwich in 2005. He says it has been a joy working with past and present colleagues at Radio Norfolk and Future Radio. Radio Norfolk made the decision to join as the festival's media partner within an hour over a coffee. "Both Peter and I learned lessons in London, that it's not who you know, but how you know them," says Kirkbride. "We take our work very seriously, but we don't take ourselves too seriously. We want everyone to have fun! It's hard work putting on a festival like this, and that's why we want to

**«Norfolk is a county brimming with 'adventure capital', says Kirkbride – companies and individuals who share a commitment for creating work of a high standard»**





ave a good time doing it. We've actively gone it and approached people we know or have enjoyed working with." Rebecca Chapman, artistic director and founder of Total Ensemble, a good example – Kirkbride has known ie actress since their days at Bristol Old Vic theatre school together.

All the festival performers and production aff are working voluntarily or on expenses ily, and ticket prices will be pegged at £10 er day (no concessions), although a limited umber of week-long passes will be on sale or £25 [see panel]. The event will lose money, at the aim is to encourage as many people s possible to come by keeping tickets afford- ole. "In time we hope it will become profit- ole," says Barrow.

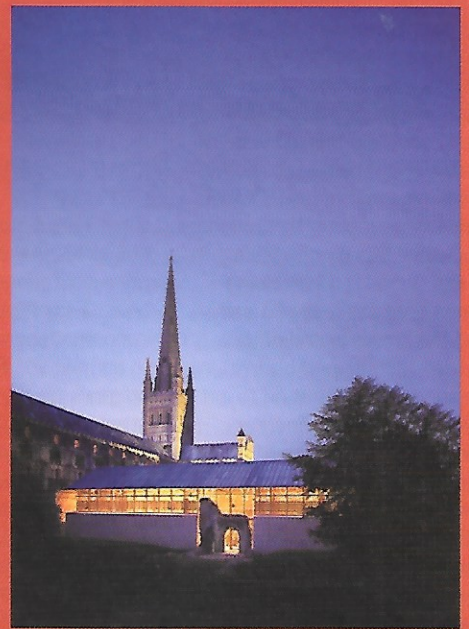
"It's definitely not a commercial project," ys Kirkbride. "We say it's an amateur produc- on with professional standards. I've worked or 20 years as a professional actor in London ad I've appeared in over a hundred plays. Bad ting happens in full-scale West End shows, TV ad film, as well as in your local drama group. ood acting happens in all the same places o – it's not about the money, being paid or ot, or being very experienced, it's about the titude and talent of the people who put on ie work." Barrow adds: "Our slogan is 'how od can we make it?'"

The partners have committed to making the ostry Festival an annual event. More visual ts are planned for next year and nearly 80 er cent of the 2012 festival has already been rogrammed in principle. "We hope to have a t more business and artistic partnerships," ys Kirkbride. "The majority of talent will ill be from Norfolk but there are practition- rs and companies I would like to work with ad I think it will be equally stimulating for the rformers." The PBSK partnership will also ontinue to work with Total Ensemble, which lans to run a series of weekly workshops oughout Norfolk over the coming year.

Meanwhile, this year's programme includes liberal sprinkling of complimentary drinks ad champagne receptions. "We're saying that ie party's on, despite the recession!" says irkbride. "William Galinsky [of the Norfolk . Norwich Festival] and Jonathan Holloway ore him have said the same thing, that in recession people look inwardly to what is a offer locally, and that's what's so excit- ing about Norwich, because there is so much ulture here." **22000**

*The Hostry Festival, Norwich Cathedral,  
1–30 October  
[www.hostryfestival.org](http://www.hostryfestival.org)  
[www.cathedral.org.uk](http://www.cathedral.org.uk)*

**Opposite:** Hostry Festival organisers Stash Kirkbride (left) and Peter Barrow  
**This page (clockwise from top):**  
*The Rainmaker*, "a classic American play"; jazz singer Kirsty Jarvis; Norwich Cathedral's Hostry building; performers from the Total Ensemble company; folk singer Jess Morgan; singer-songwriter Celeste Lovick



## STOP PRESS!

Norwich Magazine has two 'golden tickets' for the Hostry Festival to give away. The special week passes, worth £25 each, give you entry to all the events in the programme. To enter the prize draw, go to [www.norwichmagazine.co.uk](http://www.norwichmagazine.co.uk) by Friday 14 October.