



THE CEMETERY CLUB

A COMEDY TO DIE FOR!



ROSE
CENTRE

ITICKET

BY IVAN
MENCHELL

DIRECTED BY
KATHY GENT

8-22 NOVEMBER 2025

THE ROSE CENTRE, SCHOOL ROAD, BELMONT



Welcome from Stephen Hood—

PRESIDENT OF COMPANY THEATRE



Thank you for taking time out from preparations for Christmas & the year's end to see "The Cemetery Club" – where with wit, humour and bittersweetness we join three New York Jewish widows finding their own ways through their post-marriage lives. When widower Sam meets Ida, Doris and Lucille as they're all visiting the graves of their significant others, the course that follows runs far from smooth: Thanks to well-meaning friends and an awkward question of who exactly is the third wheel.

Director Kathy Gent has skilfully assembled a veteran – and younger but still veteran – cast who bring to life this story which is both simple and complex. Company Theatre welcomes back powerhouse performers Julie Collis, Lynn Webster, Catherine Maunsell & Reg Williams (fresh from directing "Out of Order" for us earlier this year), and proudly welcomes Lauren Brenner – who delivers a character making a much bigger splash than they're aware of. Supported by a skilled crew both young and older, a great time's to be had, and you're invited!

Next May, Paul Roukchan will be directing Maurice Shadbolt's **"Once on Chunuk Bair"**: Set from dawn to dusk on 8th August 1915, the day of World War One when New Zealand soldiers – with much sacrifice – took & held the hill of Chunuk Bair on Turkey's Gallipoli Peninsula. Paul's skill and experience with both directing & acting will make this testament to selfless courage in a tragic war on the other side of the world well worth seeing.

THE CAST

Ida	♣	Julie Collis
Lucille	♣	Catherine Maunsell
Doris	♣	Lynn Webster
Sam	♣	Reg Williams
Mildred	♣	Lauren Brenner

It is Autumn, 1990, in Queens, New York

ACT ONE

Scene 1 Ida's Living Room

Scene 2 Forest Hills Cemetery – immediately afterwards

Scene 3 Ida's Living Room later that afternoon

Scene 4 Forest Hills Cemetery – one month later , late afternoon

15 MINUTE Interval

During the Interval refreshments, ice creams, and a variety of drinks will be available.

ACT TWO

Scene 1 Ida's Living Room – Two weeks later

Scene 2 Ida's Living Room – 2am the next morning

Scene 3 Ida's Living Room – the same day around noon

Scene 4 Forest Hills Cemetery – late November

Meet the Players

Julie Collis



Julie has been acting her whole life, both on stage and screen. She has won awards for her film work including many around the world for her role in the short film '**Slow Dating**', but the stage is her true love. She trained in Jewellery and Textile design and is part of Collis Studios where she works alongside her husband the potter Peter Collis.

She has appeared in a number of productions for Company theatre including **Brassed Off**, **Fawlty Towers** and **Calendar Girls**.

"It is lovely to be working with Kathy again, we always have such a lot of fun. It's also wonderful to be working alongside this talented cast."

Catherine Maunsell



Catherine is delighted to be back on stage with Company Theatre. Her previous outings with Company were as Sylvia Shaw in **The Thrill of Love**, Celia in **Calendar Girls**, both directed by Kathy Gent and as Judith Bliss in **Hay Fever**. Most recently she directed **Pink Hammer** for Warkworth Theatre Group.

In **The Cemetery Club** she plays the role of Lucille, a wonderful character to inhabit. She is quick witted, outspoken and full of the joy of life. In the words of Lucille "she wanted more." It is a privilege to have the opportunity to work with Kathy and the very talented cast and crew.

Lynn Webster



Lynn last appeared with Company Theatre as Linda Loman in **Death of a Salesman** in 2023 for which she won a NAPTA Award for Outstanding Lead performer in a female role. She trained in the US & London, and enjoyed a professional career in London and New York. After moving to New Zealand in 1997, she has been on stage in more than 45 community theatre productions. Her favourite roles include, Dolly in **Hello Dolly!**, Helene Hanff in **84 Charing Cross Road**, and Nurse Ratchett in **One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest**.

However, the highlight of her career has to be playing Sarah Brown in the National Theatre's production of **Guys and Dolls** in the 80's. Creating Doris has been a challenge, made more accessible by working with a wonderful cast and director. Thanks to everyone! Lynn would like to dedicate her performance to the memory of her beloved husband, Rod Oram, who died in March of 2024. *"Another one like you I wouldn't find."*

Reg Williams



Reg first performed with Company Theatre in our 2016 production of **All My Sons** (playing Joe Keller) then in **Deathtrap** (playing Sydney Bruhl) the following year followed by **Death of a Salesman** (playing Willy Loman) in 2023 for which he received a NAPTA award for Most Outstanding Lead Performer in a Male Role. He has directed twice for Company - Shaw's **Arms and the Man** in 2019 and Ray Cooney's **Out of Order** earlier this year.

He has also recently directed **The Crucible**, **12 Angry Men**, **Evita** and **A Streetcar Named Desire**, all for Centre-stage Theatre. He tells us that a very long time ago he featured in the Emmy award winning film of **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**, playing Peter.

Lauren Brenner



Lauren Brenner has strong links to the Shore having grown up in Bayswater and now living with her three children in Hauraki; her day job is working as a GP in Hillsborough. Alongside medicine, she has always been passionate about drama and the arts, from theatre and performance poetry to creating embroidered beaded jewellery through her craft business, Crafty Bitches. She first discovered her joy for performing at high school playing Maria in **Twelfth Night**. In the last few years, she has returned to the stage with short-form improv shows such as **Jester and Ferris Wheel** at the Covert Theatre. Most recently, she has developed a love for devised theatre, performing in a workshop to showcase **The Return to Waimanuka** at Pitt Street Theatre.

Lauren who is of Jewish heritage, feels deeply grateful and humbled to take part in this production which offers a meaningful opportunity to share aspects of identity and cultural traditions that hold personal significance for her.

CREW FOR THE CEMETERY CLUB

Director	Kathy Gent
Production Managers	Stephen Hood & Vettinia Ross
Stage Manager	Lucus Laurent
Stage Crew	Ozana Pinter
Set Design & Construction	Scott Thomas
Set Construction & Painting	Tony Sandy, Stephen Hood, Max Newton, Brendan Rossiter, Kathy Gent, Suzy Sampson, Anne Rimmer, Julie Collis, Catherine Maunsell, Caroline Parker, Phil Searle
Lighting & Sound Design/Operation	Stephen Hood,
Photography	Kathryn Nobbs
Props	Vettinia Ross
Intimacy Co-ordinator	Suzy Sampson
Costumes	The Cast
Publicity	Kathy Gent
Poster Design	Raine Gilchrist
Social Media	Suzy Sampson
Programme	Paul Thompson
Website	Sherry Ede
Rehearsal Prompt	Linda Camplin
Front of House Manager	Lesley Hawkey, Sherry Ede, and all the volunteers
Bar Managers	Sherry Ede, Linda Camplin

Acknowledgements

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Daniel McKerrow, Kōwhiri Te Rango, 2023

Background to the Play

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Kathy has a love of plays that combine poignancy and humour and has sure found the golden ticket with *The Cemetery Club*, a play with the strong themes of friendship, loyalty and dealing with loss. The themes of friendship and loyalty are mirrored by the strong bonds of her cast and crew developed through her collaborative approach to directing in which all decisions have been made as a team. Her passion in directing is bringing a vision to life - taking a script and shaping it into a tangible performance with a highly motivated cast, and bringing together the artistic and creative skills of designers and builders in a real community. But above all it is providing the audience with a couple of hours when they are immersed in a different world, which may be entertaining, but is always thought-provoking.

Kathy has directed nearly twenty productions for Company theatre and has loved every moment – she hopes you thoroughly enjoy the world of *The Cemetery Club*.



Ivan Menchell's Broadway credits (plays) include:

Bonnie and Clyde, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, and The Cemetery Club.

Off Broadway/Tours include Keep Smiling Through, The Prince and the Pauper and The Surprise Party. For the screen he wrote an adaptation of The Cemetery Club and served as a co-writer on the animated feature Curious George.

An Emmy-nominated television writer, he created the critically acclaimed Showtime series, Bedtime and served as the writer on Disney Channel's Phil of the Future and JONAS. He was also a writer/producer on the long-running CBS comedy The Nanny, and the FOX dramatic series, Time of your Life. Ivan is the recipient of the Fulbright fellowship for his playwriting and is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama.

A Note From The Director

Kathy Gent



Grave Matters and Great Laughter

The Cemetery Club may sound like a sombre title but this play is anything but heavy, in fact it is about relishing life. There is a wonderful mix of humour and depth, and although the characters are struggling with grief, they are portrayed in a very relatable and funny way. This is a show that will make you laugh and will most certainly make you cry; the challenge has been to get the level of humour and sadness just right. It is the strong personalities of these five very believable characters in this fine ensemble piece that are so hilarious, memorable and touching, they tug at the heartstrings and make us all think how we each approach and cope with the loss of loved ones in our lives. And it is the very stark differences in their personalities that provide the basis for the funny, moving interactions between them. What I love about this play is its humanity and humour as it tackles our need for love, friendship and human contact as we age, and gives us hope and joy in moving forward. But in the end it is the strong personalities of these five very believable characters in this fine ensemble piece that will tug at the heartstrings and make our audience think how we each approach and cope with the one certainty in life that is grief.

Enjoy the show!

Kathy Gent
Director

NEXT AT COMPANY

THEATRE 2026

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Once on Chunuk Bair



This photograph from Maurice Shadbolt's play *Once on Chunuk Bair* shows its first production, at Auckland's Mercury Theatre in 1982. The action takes place between dawn and dusk on 8 August 1915, the day New Zealand soldiers took the hill of Chunuk Bair on the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey during the First World War, suffering savage losses in the process. Shadbolt questions the wisdom of New Zealand participation in a remote European conflict, and undercuts the myth of the heroic Anzac soldier. A filmed version of the play appeared in 1991.

Auckland Council Libraries – Tāmaki Pātaka Kōrero o Tāmaki Makaurau, Sir George Grey Special Collections

Reference: NZMS813(Chunuk Bair). By Michel Tubberty