

# Breaking News

October 2007  
Volume 1, Issue 9

## *The Monthly Newsletter of the Break a Leg Theatre Group*

### *Special Interest Articles:*

- **News from the Nile!**
- **Sanford Meisner writes for us! (well, almost)**
- **"Someone Who'll Watch Over Me" update**



## "October, already!"

Hi everyone,

Firstly, I must apologise for the lack of Newsletter last month (you did notice, didn't you?). Lack of organisation, looking after kids, rushing here, going there, you know how it is. Let me make up for it by saying that this issue has extra value for you (3 pages, no less - and at no extra cost!)

Most of you will be aware that Barry and Dianne Whitehead have been away for the last several weeks, enjoying a much-earned holiday across parts of Europe. In this issue, we have the latest communication from them, all the way from Egypt! By the time you read this, they should be almost winging

their way back to their cosy little home in Yinnar.

We have some new dates listed for our production of "Someone Who'll Watch Over Me". Write them down in your diaries for a night of entertainment you won't forget in a hurry. (I speak from experience; I saw this play 14 years ago and have not forgotten it!)

Thanks also to Ernie Rijs who supplied with me an article on the acting techniques of Sanford Meisner. I'm sure many of you will be interested in this. Please remember that you can submit anything you feel would be appropriate for our newsletter.

Hope you enjoy this issue.

- Mandy

## *Greetings from the Nile....*

G'day folks - greetings from the Nile River adjacent Aswan - I'd do it in Arabic but I am still refining some of the grammar rules. Egypt is amazing, Cairo is unbelievable. Book me in for a dinner party when we get home and I will regale you with travel tales that will amaze you - anything from donkeys, to temples, to traffic that is unbelievable to hassling souvenir sellers that are the best in the game to egyptian wine (an acquired taste which I am still acquiring). The Nile River is everything you have been told and ten times more and it has a lot of water in it. Our cruise has been exciting, adventurous and oh so relaxing in parts and you have but a mere snippet of the fun, excitement and thrills we have had. I was nearly taken out in downtown Aswan traffic today! We are now in the home straight and after three days in Dubai we can now say we will be home next week - look out Mackenzie here we come!! Love and greetings to you all -maybe time for a snippet in Dubai. Otherwise look us up after October 4 - we will be the ones slumped in the lounge with a cold Aussie beer, a grand-daughter and a collection of photos you won't believe - as they say in Arabic - here's looking up your old address.

Dianne and Barry



## Break a Leg Theatre Group



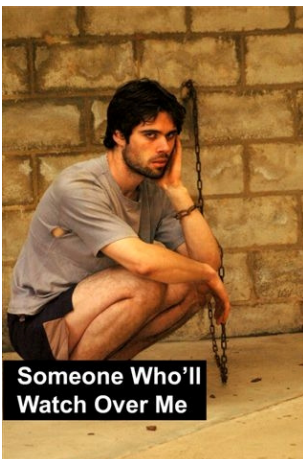
We're on the Web!

See us at:

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

### Theatrical terms:

**Actors** – People who stand between the audience and the Set Designer's art, blocking the view. That's also the origin of the word blocking, by the way.



## Getting to know....

Ernie Rijs

**Name:** Ernie Rijs

**Any Nicknames:** Rijsie

**First time ever on stage:** I think it was playing the piano in an Eisteddfod when I was about 9 or 10 (it was sooooo long ago now); but it could also have been singing with my Dad in a little family group.

**Favourite thing to do when not on stage:** Sharing a meal and good times with friends; hugging one of my daughters; seeing a fabulous stage production.

**How do you relax?** Reading, exercising, watching movies, going out for a meal, sleeping.

**Favourite Song of all time:** Don't have one. There are too many. Recently I have loved "February Song" by Josh Groban and "You Raised Me Up" – even though many see this as religious, I see it as a tribute to my dear friends and family.

**What's your most treasured possession:** My health.

**What role on stage would you give anything to have?** Anything? Well, then I'd have Javert (Les Mis), but whatever role comes my way is good.

**What 3 people (living or not) would you invite to your place for dinner:** : I'd want to invite heaps more than three. But I'd start with Dad (who has been dead for 26 years) just to see his face light up; then both sets of grandparents whom I never met.

**Highlight of your life so far:** . Recently it's actually seeing the Cats wallop Brisbane at Kardinia park. Longer term its holding all my daughters just after they were born. But I have many more.

**What piece of advice would you give to anyone wanting to act on stage?** Do it because you love it, and then work at it.

**What is your worst habit?** Picking out "bad" habits in other people. It really turns me off myself.

**What's your favourite way to spend a Friday night:** Something that involves a meal, physical activity, soft lighting, good music, and smiling a lot. Now, make sure that you don't jump to any conclusions – meanings within meanings here.

**If you could have any career at all, what would it be:** Director as part of a professional theatre company or a Counsellor..... But my present career as a teacher in a school is also rewarding and leading somewhere.

**What will be written on your tombstone:** Always lived his life in the present and was grateful for it.

### "Someone Who'll Watch Over Me" – Update

Rehearsals are continuing and a fantastic show is coming together. Thank you to everyone who has offered to help along the way. Although there aren't that many jobs, your willingness to assist has been greatly appreciated!

It would be great if all Break a Leg members get behind this play, and spread the word amongst your family, friends, workmates, etc. Let's get as many people along to see our show as we can.

The next few weeks will be taken up with spreading the word, and we're in the process of getting a group of us together to walk the streets and put posters up in shop windows. We need as much help as possible, so please anyone who would like some posters to put up please contact Dan.

Show Dates - October 26<sup>th</sup> **Drouin Butter Factory** – October 27<sup>th</sup> **Traralgon**  
On to Sale and Yinnar in November.....

## Break a Leg Theatre Group



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*Whatever you  
can do, or dream  
you can, begin it.  
Boldness has  
genius, power  
and magic in it.  
- Goethe*

Some reflections on a couple of books I have been reading on the teaching and ideas of Sanford Meisner who was a vastly experienced and respected teacher in New York. He worked with Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, Robert Lewis at the Group Theater where they explored Stanislavsky's theories about acting and the training of actors. Eventually Meisner split from the group because he felt that the process was becoming too inward-looking. He saw acting as doing rather than reflecting.

*The best acting, he believed, was made up of spontaneous responses to the actor's immediate surroundings. Meisner explained that his approach was designed "to eliminate all intellectuality from the actor's instrument and to make him a spontaneous responder to where he is, what is happening to him, what is being done to him." (pbs.org)*

Born August 31, 1905, and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Sanford Meisner graduated from Erasmus Hall in 1923 and attended The Damrosch Institute of Music (now Juilliard), where he studied to become a concert pianist before talking his way into a job in a Theater Guild production of Sidney Howard's *They Knew What They Wanted*. He realized then that acting which really "dug at him" was what he was looking to find. He experienced many physical challenges including losing most of his larynx and failing eyesight. He died on February 2, 1997 aged 91.

From reading about Meisner and following the way he taught his students, it strikes me that I am coming to believe that acting is exactly like life – no, not *like* life, it IS life. And life is behaviour, doing. The Latin root of the word "drama" is to do. It is clear from this that we have usurped this word to our own convenience. It also strikes me that life is lived in the present, that what happens occurs now, at this moment; and that time, as we understand it, is merely a series of present moments. So acting becomes a series of present moments in which the actor DOES.

Meisner developed a series of exercises that aimed to help the actor stay present both to himself and to the partner on stage. I also think that actors only ever have one partner, no matter how big the cast might be, because s/he is working only with one person at a time or on his own. This is a profound thing for me. There is only me in the present and then someone comes and knocks and there is only me and her in the present. So whatever I do must be authentic because my partner must have authenticity to "work off".

To become an actor requires practice, work, sweat and commitment. And to believe that there is no such thing as nothing. Interested actors would do well to read "Sanford Meisner: on acting" and "The Sanford Meisner Approach: an actor's workbook" by Larry Silverberg. Both books are very accessible and non-technical.

- Ernie Rijs

### Theatre-related Superstitions:

Blue is an unlucky color for an actor to wear the world over, silver being it's only saving relief. Certain shades of yellow, also, are considered unlucky, particularly in a tie, a vest, or a hat. It is believed to be disastrous to allow a yellow clarinet in the orchestra.

#### **The Origin:**

In the early days of theatre, blue was an extremely difficult dye color to create, and therefore was very expensive. Any theatre company spending such extravagant amounts on costumes was sure to close without turning a profit. Unless, of course, they were wearing silver, which was an indicator that the entire company was being funded by a VERY wealthy source; wealthy enough to afford silver adornments.

Green and yellow, during the era of the morality plays, were often considered a symbol of the Devil. A devil in disguise might be identified by wearing a green or yellow tie, vest, or hat.