

Artist sought for new-look underpass

By David Melsome

The Grange Big Local team have put out a call for local street artists and poets to get involved after their improvement plans for the pedestrian underpass beneath the Northern line between Trinity Road and Manor Park Road, N2, were given the go-ahead.

As we have previously reported, the underpass is one of the regeneration organisation's flagship projects and their aim is to create a welcoming and safe space that celebrates community spirit.

Grange Big Local is already collaborating with local schools to ask students to design artwork and write poetry that reflects the character and diversity of East Finchley. They are also looking to commission street artists and poets to paint selected artwork, with verse included.

Big Local. "We have a tight deadline on poetry by the end of January and artwork by end of February 2025." Artists and poets can find out more by contacting Karen at karen@grangebiglocal.org.

The underpass revamp, formally approved now by Barnet Council and the GBL board, is scheduled to start in February and run through to June. Works will include soft lighting in the tunnel, resurfacing, drainage removal of bollards and



Smart art: How one of the paths through the underpass will look

Tight deadline

"We're excited to bring this project to life and have the local community contribute to a lasting legacy," said Karen Hart, project manager for Grange

upgrading the barriers to allow wheelers and pushchairs to get through more easily, while still preventing illegal use by motorbikes, mopeds and bicycles.



Resting actors: Bernard O'Sullivan and John Rayment in *Almost The Birthday Party*

Review: Almost the Birthday Party

By Jessica Holt

The Old Red Lion is the perfect setting for this play, written by Finchley resident Paul Kalburgi. It is small and dark, enabling this absurdist comic drama to envelop the audience. With one lampshade, one two-seater sofa and a large portrait of the face of a cat, the stage is set for the actors Bernard O'Sullivan as Kenny and John Rayment as Vern to entertain us, and that they do with great skill.

Their ambition as resting actors is to put on *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter, but they have a problem: they can only find Act 1, part of Act 2 and none of Act 3! However, this doesn't put them off trying to gather a company around them to perform it.

In the first act, they share their struggles with the imaginary character Mrs Percival, who listens to their failed attempts to get the production off the ground. Without giving away too much, their struggles involve a vicar performing an exorcism in the cellar to rid it of the ghost of Eartha Kitt (why would you want to do that?). Then there is a cake with an item that should definitely not be there and a failed Heimlich manoeuvre which leads indirectly to a prison sentence.

Extended version

This is where the play originally ended when Paul Kalburgi put it on 10 years ago, lasting 25 minutes. On his return from New Zealand and the US (where he continued to write for theatre and TV), he was inspired to develop the play with a new running time of 60 minutes. And the second half is as witty and menacing as the first.

Two new characters, played by the same actors, this time their story with the imaginary Katie, Kenny's daughter. The dialogue is compelling and has a musical rhythm that befits the complex ideas expressed. We all know the catchphrase "less is more" but at the end I still wanted more. I wanted to meet all those characters mentioned, created so evocatively by the writer.

Paul Kalburgi's influences are Victoria Wood and Alan Bennett, and he strongly believes in entertainment for

entertainment's sake.

There's nothing wrong with that, but he also offers much more. You don't need to know the original play by Pinter

because this work speaks for itself loud and clear. The direction by Scott Le Cass is crisp and enables the actors to thrive in their roles and enjoy the dark story they are telling.

RICKY SAVAGE... THE VOICE OF IRRESPONSIBILITY

Climate-conscious Christmas

You can tell that Christmas is coming because the adverts have taken over. M&S have mainlined on Dawn French, Aldi have got their animated carrot out of the freezer, John Lewis have channelled their inner Narnia with a clothes rack instead of a wardrobe and Sainsbury's have hired the Big Friendly Giant. Every time you switch on the TV you get ads for perfumes and cut-price holidays just to remind you to max out the credit card.

And besides the ads, the lights are going on. As you walk down the street people are doing the annual Christmas show-off light display, ranging from the expensively tasteful to the seriously tacky. You know, at one end the white lights on the Christmas tree in the front garden, at the other a selection of neon reindeer, and a fat Santa with a stupid grin looking too stuffed on mince pies to get down any chimney.

But what with climate change threatening snow in July and a heatwave in February, every self-respecting Range Rover owner has to make an effort to fight against all this consumerism. The problem is where to start.

How about with presents? Instead of all that plastic, go sustainable and choose a wooden train set that looks like it was handcrafted by a Victorian carpenter from old beer crates? And if it turns out that in fact it was made in China by people whose idea of a living wage is not starving, it's the thought that counts, especially when you have to have that difficult conversation with a child who was expecting an Xbox.

And for your dearest beloved, a piece of jewellery made from recycled buttons just like the ones you made in primary school, except those didn't come in at 20 quid a go. Good luck with that conversation too.

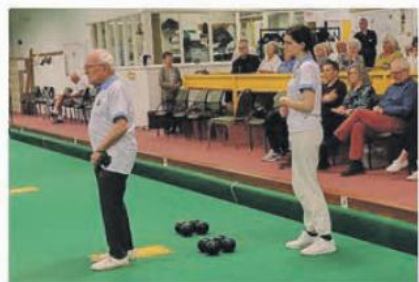
Same with the food. What about an organically farmed limited-edition free-range turkey? It will still have the consistency of sawdust and taste like carpet, but the extra £20 is worth it. It's the same with the cake, why get a factory-made bargain from a supermarket when you can spend twice as much for something with a totally organic sticker... or make one yourself. It may not taste any good but you'll feel better knowing you've done your bit for the planet. And that will give you a lovely warm feeling as you prepare to jet off on your mid-winter long-haul break in Bali. Bottoms up!



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