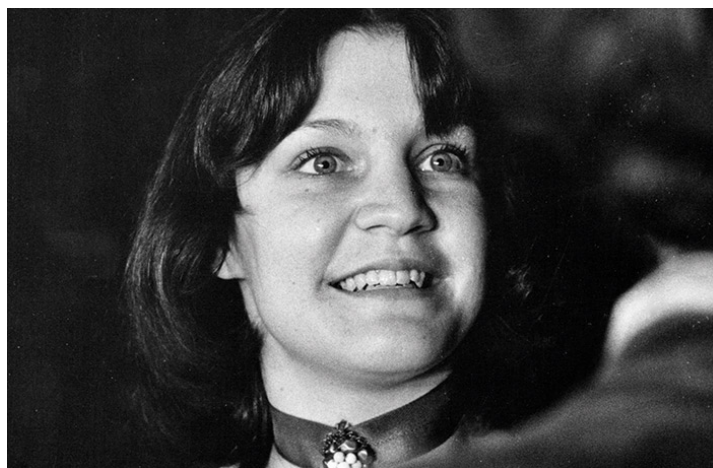


# The Stage, 25 September 2024

## Margarete Forsyth

OBITUARIES SEP 25, 2024 BY NICK SMURTHWAITE

Director, writer, designer and translator who ran Greenwich Studio Theatre in the 1990s



*Margarete Forsyth*

German-born Margarete Forsyth was an award-winning director, writer and translator who, with her late husband Julian Forsyth, managed the Greenwich Studio Theatre in the 1990s.

As a member of staff at Goldsmiths College in the 1980s, Forsyth cut her directorial teeth with German-language versions of Brecht's *Life of Galileo*, Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* and

Dürrenmatt's *The Visit*.

In 1986, she made her professional debut at London's Young Vic Studio, directing Goethe's *Faust Part 1*, with her husband Julian in the title role, while a number of her former Goldsmiths students covered backstage tasks. A review in *The Stage* described the production as "exhilarating".

Shored up by this success, Forsyth launched her own production company, the Rude Mechanicals, reviving *Faust* in 1987, this time with her husband playing Mephistopheles, followed by Büchner's *Danton's Death*, for which she and her former Goldsmiths colleague Peter Christian provided a new translation.

For its final production in 1990, the Rude Mechanicals staged *Life of Galileo*, with Bernard Kay in the title role. Kay, who died in 2014, went on to appear in many of her subsequent productions.

Forsyth's move to the 84-seat Greenwich Studio Theatre in London was prompted by the success of her newly devised adaptation of a five-play cycle by Arthur Schnitzler, which she called *Women of No Importance* (1990). Over the next few years, they mounted productions of 10 more European plays, mostly translated or adapted by Julian, including Marivaux's *The Will* and Dürrenmatt's *A Spanner in the Works*. Directing and set design was Margarete's province.

The Forsyths attracted favourable reviews in the national press and won a *Time Out* award for their first year's programme, with Margarete being nominated for best director in the 1994 London Fringe Awards. In 1995 the theatre lost out to the

Royal Court in London for the Empty Space Peter Brook Award.

After problems with their tenancy in Greenwich, the Forsyths relocated to Battersea Arts Centre in 1996 where they became Greenwich Studio Theatre in Exile. After the upheaval, the first productions were revivals, but four new works followed, culminating in Mischa Spoliansky's cabaret opera *Send for Mr Plim*, set in a department store, with the songs performed by vocal group Cantabile and members of local store Arding & Hobbs in non-speaking roles.

Forsyth was always in demand to direct at London's drama schools, notably Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts. One of her students in the first group was Eddie Marsan, who went on to play roles in many Greenwich productions. She also directed at LAMDA, Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art and Rose Bruford College, and she became a regular at East 15, to whom she later donated the costume collection from Greenwich.

After her production of CP Taylor's *Good for East 15* in 2003, Forsyth embarked on a year'-long course at Motley, the set-design school, giving her a recognised qualification that allowed her to work as a freelance designer for other theatre companies.

Forsyth's understanding and love of opera led to many years as a producer and director for weekend workshops at Carl Rosa Opera in north London. Non-professionals were given three days to rehearse an opera from scratch for public performance. A knowledge of German popular music of the 1920s and 1930s also led to her

collaborating with Cantabile, who would call upon her to devise shows to tour to Germany.

Her most consistent employment outside the theatre world was as a translator, setting up her own translation business in 1990.

Even after life-changing surgery for throat cancer, Forsyth still undertook some mostly local, smaller-scale theatrical projects such as the staging of Bach's Coffee Cantata, using the whole of the main hall in Charlton House. In 2017, she staged a one-off "workshop performance" of Send for Mr Plim, revised by her husband since its Greenwich premiere, for an invited audience in a West End theatre.

Margarete Forsyth was born on June 2, 1954, and died on July 26. Her husband, Julian, predeceased her in July this year. She is survived by her son Dettmer.