

# INTERMISSION

Members of the University share details of their interests outside their working lives

**Greg Sweetnam**, Estates Services,  
Receptionist at the Gibson Building

During the week I'm often carrying out reception duties at the front desk of the Gibson Building, but most Saturday mornings you'll find me composing poetry at the Queen's Lane Coffee House.

I didn't have much of an interest in poetry before joining a writing workshop at the Old Fire Station in 1983, frequented by everyone from fellow beginners to established Oxford poets. I was soon hooked and found myself reading more and more poetry – as well as trying to write it. Over the years, others at the workshop became friends and mentors, providing encouragement and useful advice.

I slowly found my voice, influenced by Irish poets like Seamus Heaney and Derek Mahon, and have since been widely published, most recently in November's *Oxford Magazine* and, further back, nine works were included in the Oxford Poets Anthology in 2004. When I first saw the book sitting on a shelf in Waterstones I could hardly believe it. I'd loved to have signed it and put it back!

A future ambition is to have my own book of poetry published, but it's important to just focus on the poem at hand. I'm always trying to surprise myself – if I am not surprised, how's the reader going to be? I often deliver public readings around Oxford and give talks to students about life as a practising poet.

**From *The émigré sketchbook***

*iii*

*What allows the girl with soft pencils  
to look up*

*At the still life, the night sky beyond  
the bay window*

*And, under a bulb of daylight, transcribe  
the moth's*

*Flutter not as a butterfly but a  
hummingbird,*

*Is the hesitation reflected in the glass,*

*The barely-visible mother who is  
weighing up*

*School in the morning with her gifts  
of time and space.*

GREG SWEETNAM

**Nathan Grassi**, Communications  
Officer, The Centre on Migration, Policy  
and Society (COMPAS)

While researching early-20th-century New York with my comedy partner, Ida Berglöw Kenneway, we were amazed to find a black and white photo of a Coney Island food cart labelled 'Nathan & Ida's Hot Dogs'. So we did some digging – and discovered it was related to Nathan's Famous, a large fast food chain in the US, founded in 1916 by Nathan and Ida Handwerker from Poland.

The name coincidence was just too good

to pass up. We created a show titled Nathan & Ida's Hot Dog Stand which is loosely based on their lives - letting our minds run wild. It's a classic rags-to-riches comedy full of romance and adventure, which includes puppetry, mime, dance and the incomprehensible 'diner-speak' of the 1930s. The show has been performed at festivals around the UK, won two awards and is about to set off on tour again – including a two-week season in London.

In a very different experience to live theatre, I also directed a podcast called

Victoriocity – a comedy detective series set in an alternative Victorian London. The podcast is now in its second season and is free to download. There is an extraordinary scene set in a fictional Oxford college – which must be heard to be believed.

Upcoming tour dates:  
[www.nathanandida.com](http://www.nathanandida.com)

Subscribe, download and listen to the podcast: [www.victoriocity.com](http://www.victoriocity.com)

Nathan and Ida in action

