



## ART DIRECTORS (lockdown) BLOG

Hi theatre fanatics!

I'll forego the usual comments such as 'isn't it all a bit odd...' and 'strange times indeed...' and cut straight to the quick, the stuff you want to know – what is the QMT doing in lockdown?

Well a number of things is the answer. For start-offs, we meet every **Monday at 8pm** on Zoom and you are welcome to join us. You'll need Zoom downloaded on your device (phone, iPad, MacBook or PC) and visit Facebook (Bancroft Players Members group) to find the details of how to join in (or see below). Never been on Facebook? Don't worry, it's very easy to set up an account and then just search for Bancroft Players and we'll come up. You'll find lots of stuff on our Bancroft Players members page including how to stream shows from other theatres (Hampstead, National etc.), amusing divertissements posted by the group as well as up-to-date news about the theatre. And, once things are clearer, plans for re-opening the QMT. Overall there are just lots of things to see and participate in!

I am planning some online workshops too for actors and would-be directors. So, to stay in the know, head for our Facebook page and log on!

The youth theatre also continues to meet every Sunday on Zoom. Rob Hughes has written them a play they can rehearse online. They need to shoot a bit of footage too on their phones and that will be incorporated into the final show too. Hopefully it will be the first thing we put on when the QMT eventually does go live – whenever that may be.

And as you can see our newsletter goes on, thanks to a dedicated team for keeping this vital part of the group in good working order!

Finally and sincerely – our hearts go out to those that have lost family and friends to the disease and we remember them in our thoughts and prayers. Stay safe, my friends.

*Rory Reynolds*

Arts Director

### **Zoom into BP LIVE** -How members get creative and stay in contact.

BP Live has been a popular way of staying creative in lockdown amongst a growing number of our members. Short plays by groups of actors, monologues, improvisations and more has meant we can gather around the PC or phone and engage in exiting performances. And of course some chat too.



BP LIVE is happening every Monday.

Sit back to be entertained, or be inspired to take part as a director, actor, writer or host another Monday.

Download [Zoom](#) and login with access codes:

Meeting ID: 587 2016 2598

Meeting Password: 586521

[Curtains up Mondays at 20:00](#)

## In the Spotlight....

### Alison Hancock

Alison Hancock is perhaps one of the most prolific actors down at the QMT. She has appeared in many shows at the QMT both as a lead and, unmistakably, in the odd tiny role. Alison first came down to the QMT in 2006 to take part in Jon Brown's Christmas show, *James and the Giant Peach* where she played the horrid Aunt Spiker to Vivienne Kerr's Aunt Sponge. Over the past 14 years she has gone on to take parts in literally dozens of shows: *The Graduate* (as Benjamin's mother), *The Lady in the Van* (as the slowly-deteriorating Miss Shepherd), and, most recently, the fully-fledged harridan of harridans, Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. So we tracked her down and asked some searching questions. Just who is Alison Hancock?



#### **What's your favourite show?**

Well that's so hard to choose. I loved being in *Jerusalem* of course (September 2011). It was such an epic production I would have done anything to be in it. As it was I played the tiniest role and I couldn't have been happier. The cast got on so well together and it was such fun. I also loved being in *The Ladykillers* (Sept 2017) for the same reason – Gareth, Charles Plester, Dougie Brooker, Elliott, Greg and I just never stopped laughing. Well, I know I didn't!

#### **If you could re-run your life – is there anything you might do a bit differently?**

I think if I could go back to being young, and knowing what I know now, I would love to have gone into professional acting. I didn't feel it was an option for me at the time, but as I look at it now, I think with some encouragement I might have gone for it. I've always loved stage acting because of the connection you form with the audience. It's so immediate and live in the theatre. But as a professional, I would also have liked to explore film and TV and done some radio work. I think a career like Dame Judy's would have suited me very well!

#### **What's the craziest thing you've ever done?**

Ever done? Hmm – no, perhaps I won't share that....

One thing I did do that seemed pretty crazy at the time was that after teacher training I decided to go to Italy. It was a spur-of-the-moment thing: I just bought a large rucksack and set off for a couple of weeks in a friend's flat in Florence, just behind the Cathedral. But my 'holiday' turned into a stay of about 14 years. It was beautiful. I learned Italian and started teaching English to keep going. In the end I was teaching at the University of Florence. The whole experience was magical.

#### **If you could take one record to a desert island, which one would it be?**

Oh God! I don't know, it'd take me ages to decide. There are so many. Off the top of my head I suppose I'd say *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Rossini. It was my father's favourite and it always makes me think of him when I hear it. (But put on *Happy* by Pharrell Williams or anything by the Stones and I'm up and dancing...)

#### **What's your favourite quote?**

Well my students would say that I tell them 'life is short' - rather a lot! This is code for 'get on with your work' of course, although in truth I'm one of the world's great procrastinators myself. It's good advice anyway – don't put things off because life is truly short.

#### **What dream role would you like to play?**

Oh I don't know! Perhaps Lady Macbeth played as an older woman. I do love Shakespeare. I want more sessions with Carlyss (*Carlyss Peer is a classical actress who also works at The Globe in London and often runs Shakespeare workshops for the Bancroft Players and the youth theatre*). Or one of the great female roles in Chekhov. I also enjoy those 'bare bones' shows we do sometimes with little set and few props. I remember *Beacons* in the Studio especially (Jan 2019). Three actors, a rough old cabin and a few lights – brilliant!

#### **Thanks Alison!**

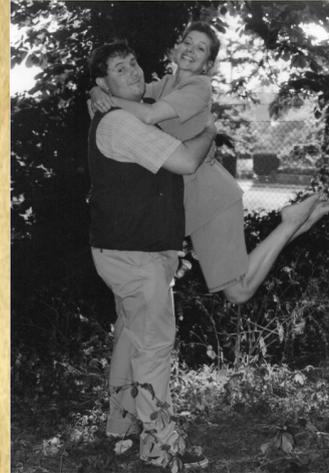
Well thank you. And do me a favour – give me more notice next time and you'll get different answers! But thanks, I've enjoyed it.

## Test Your memory

Just before the lockdown we scanned the photographs of the QMT archive with the view to make them easier to access in future. Photographs have been named and catalogued. Well most of them anyway. Here are just 2 of a dozen or so “orphan” pictures for which we would like to know the play and the actors. If you can help, email [gmtbarcrofters@gmail.com](mailto:gmtbarcrofters@gmail.com) or head for our Bancroft Players members Facebook page.



Do not adjust your glasses; this is our very own Colette House on the right. Unfortunately, she doesn't recall the play this is from. Do you?

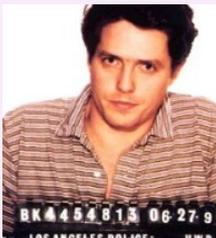


This photo was checked the full cast picture for the Darling Buds of May having been advised this picture is from that play. However, these two do no feature on it. Can you help to identify the play and the actors?

## CAN YOU IDENTIFY THESE ACTOR MUGSHOTS?

Just in cast you didn't have you full fill of quizzes lately, here is a short quiz question.

Who are the famous actors in these mugshots. email [gmtbarcrofters@gmail.com](mailto:gmtbarcrofters@gmail.com) or head for our Bancroft Players members Facebook page.



## THE WITCHES

NAME



Since Shakespeare did not name the witches in Macbeth, here is your chance to get creative. Name the witches and post the on our Bancroft Players Member Facebook page or email [gmtbarcrofters@gmail.com](mailto:gmtbarcrofters@gmail.com)

## Greta Johnson remembered

With great sadness, I am letting you know that Greta passed away on Friday 1st of May after a two year battle with cancer. Greta was an active and dedicated member of the BP's for many years, not only appearing on stage, but also working behind the scenes and front of house. Greta first appeared in the Lark in 1989 and made her final appearance on the QMT stage in 2017 in the Lady Killers, having trod the QMT boards a total of 23 times.



Greta Johnson (top right) with Nicki Pope and Sue Mason as the three witches in Macbeth 1992

I worked with her many times. My first play with Greta was Macbeth back in 1992 directed by Keith Swainston. Along with Suzie Mason, we played the Witches, covered in mud had blacked out teeth - fabulous! Greta was also the Blue Fairy in Pinocchio which I directed. She brought an elegant and serene sternness to the role. Greta was known for her ability to source the most random props imaginable. She had a wicked sense of humour, and didn't stand any nonsense.

Thank you Greta, you will always be remembered fondly. For me, "Glide Greta, Glide" will always be your epitaph - those who know, know I'm sure fellow BP's have their own memories.

Nicki Pope

## HOW TO STAY ALERTED

Hands up, staying in touch with the members (& audiences) is a challenge during the lockdown. New arrangements at home, restricted access to the theatre and use of our IT systems all make it slightly more difficult than usual to update websites, or send emails. And we cannot post newsletters to your door for now.

What we do have is an active members Facebook group on which we post news. Theatre news, announcements of our BP Live Monday performances, good shows that are being streamed and more. **To stay in touch with what is happening, the best way is to get on Facebook and join the Bancroft Players members group.**

For those involved in the creative activities that take place on Mondays, there is a WhatsApp group dedicated to the arrangements such as selecting players, plays and directors. Contact Christine Neal or Nicki Pope if you wish to join that group.

So stay in touch and let the show go on.



### BANCROFT PLAYERS' 200 CLUB

Another short report this month, for obvious reasons. Hope everyone is staying safe, well and sane! And don't forget, June sees our £50 draw!

Two months winners to congratulate this time around

Paula Downes

#### April 2020

David Hillelson

Edith Pratt

Emma Northcott

Doug Brooker

#### May 2020

Lucy Farley\*

Andrew Carmichael

Jane Houghton

Brian Hull

£25.00

£20.00

£15.00

£10.00

\* Lucy has kindly donated her win to the theatre to help finances during Lockdown. Many thanks



## Alan Bailes

**We were all shocked and saddened to learn of the death of Alan Bailes, Lighting Designer and Technical Guru at the Queen Mother Theatre. He will be greatly missed by all in the Bancroft Players, including the technical and backstage teams, directors, actors and front of house.**

*'We have lost one of our Dream Team – never to be forgotten, always grateful' - Nicki Pope*

Perhaps key to Alan's understanding of lighting a show successfully was the fact that his background wasn't purely technical. Although we think of him as the quiet man in black, hidden behind the lighting desk, in fact his theatrical experience began on stage, not backstage.

Alan was born in Zambia, and it was at school in Harare that Alan first set foot on the stage, teaming up with the local girls' school to perform in shows such as *'Smike'*. With the family's return to the UK, we find Alan acting, singing and dancing in *'Oklahoma!'* and *'Hello Dolly!'* Many musicals later, he met and married Sarah. They directed several shows together, including *'Dazzle'* by our own John Gardiner. He was also working closely with the lighting designer and eventually (and inevitably) found himself designing and operating the lighting in those labour-intensive days before computerised boards. Later they moved to North Herts and joined Hitchin Thespians.

Meanwhile productions such as *'Sweeney Todd'* had introduced Alan to the delights of the Queen Mother Theatre, and he soon became a valued member of our lighting team. Over the course of his career he has been involved in over 200 shows. At the QMT that included working in the intimate surroundings of the Richard Whitmore Studio on plays such as *'The Weir'*, with the audience nose to nose with the actors. Meanwhile in the Main Theatre, the opportunity for flexible staging presented exciting challenges. Here, memorably he lit two very different productions for director Martyn Jolly. The traverse staging of *'Hedda Gabler'* stretched the full length of the auditorium, and required a full re-rigging of the grid. 'He was marvellous,' says Martyn. 'Nothing was too much trouble.' By contrast, *'Waiting for Godot'* was played in a dark, constrained space on the stage, backlit by a huge moon. Both showed Alan's ability to realise the vision of a director, and to respond to the different dramatic requirements of the text and actors. Another highlight was working with Carl Rutherford on the phenomenally successful but technically complex *'Avenue Q'*.

Among the qualities that Alan listed as necessary for a lighting designer and which he had in abundance, were having a vision of what a scene would look like, understanding the feel of a show, attending rehearsals as often as possible, getting to know your space, using time well, preparation, and above all, keeping calm in the face of deadlines. He admitted that 'I'm my own worst critic and during the week of the show I often look at things and question what I've done. But I think that's a good thing as I'll learn from it.'



Some of my own favourite moments as a director at the QMT were spent quietly, calmly and methodically going through lighting cues with Alan, gradually building the atmosphere and visual language of a production before calling in the actors. He generously tolerated my aversion to 'washes' and frequent call for a 'rock n' roll rig', adding subtlety where needed. He was in his element doing the special train effects for *'The Railway Children.'* As he said, 'Most of all I enjoy creating the moment.'

Director Nicki Pope valued Alan as part of her 'Dream Team', and his productions with her included *'Sherlock'*, *'Flare Path'* and most recently *'Anne Boleyn'*, where his subtle but dramatic lighting of the forest of columns was superb. She says, 'He loved working on that show, bringing Tudor England to the QMT stage with such class. He made a speech at the cast party, saying he had never had so many compliments for his lighting and had loved working on it. As the director working with a very clear and challenging vision, I couldn't have been happier.'

With two performance spaces and four acting companies resident at the QMT, as well as hires such as Putteridge Bury Operatic Society, the production schedule could be relentless, whilst Alan's job also put pressure on him. In addition, Alan was Chairman of the Thespians for several years leading the Society into increasingly successful use of Woodside as a performance venue and forging good links with the Bancroft Players.

However, despite all the pressure he invariably remained calm and well-prepared. Helen Ashworth recalls making sure that his favourite pint was always ready for him in the interval of a show, and he would slip out onto the terrace and enjoy a well-earned moment of peace and tranquillity.

Our deepest sympathy goes to Sarah and family at this very sad time.

*Rosemary Bianchi*

