



# The Bancroft Players

Newsletter  
April 2018



Alison Hudson and Doug Brooker in 'The Effect', by Lucy Prebble. Directed by Sam Powell. Photo: Julian Newman Turner.

Rory Reynolds

## Club nights, 'Quartet' and a new season almost upon us

With *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Lemons* (x5) now fully cast, we have officially held the last auditions of the current season.

I know! Why it seems like only yesterday, my dears, that I was hailing the 2017-18 season as the wonder of the theatrical age, and then we turn round, get ourselves all Christmassy and before the Easter Bunny even hops into our lives - it's over. Flash-Bang-Wallop! Another year gone!

But wait - the news is good. There is a another Season in prospect! All it needs is EC approval before it's all announced and then the brand new, spanking, sparkling programme for 2018-19 will be with us.

But we have lots of other things going on here at the QMT to tempt you. We want you to have fun, guys - even though there isn't mushroom in our busy schedule (gettitt!).

For one thing we have the new Club Nights coming up. I won't run through them all here as they are advertised elsewhere in this learned organ. But please, please, please make an effort to come along. We want you to create here at the QMT the sort of family that you choose to be part of. And its a fun family and it's a caring family and it's above all a theatrical family.

So the first one is Desert Island Discs on 13 April. You love DID. Who doesn't? Now you get a chance to be on it. You don't even need to bring

Artistic Director's blog

the songs because we have Spotify. What's Spotify I hear you ask. Not an acne cream if that's what you're thinking. Anyway, come down. Free wine and everything.

Finally please book tickets to see our wonderful production of Ronald Harwood's *Quartet*. With the great Charles Plester, the impeccable Alison Hancock, together with Sir Brian Seal and Lady Helen Huson and all under the inspired direction of Lord Elliott of Bunker - what could go wrong? Seriously though it is a great play and will stick in your mind long after the lights go down.

So - merry BP's - read on. Pages of fun, facts and f'invitations await you...

Rory

**COMING SOON:**

**I Don't Like Mondays**  
(Big Spirit)  
25-28 April  
Main Theatre

**Spring Awakening**  
(Big Spirit)  
10 - 12 May,  
Richard Whitmore Studio

**Quartet**  
14-19 May,  
Main Theatre

**SAVE THE DATE:**  
**Bancroft Players AGM**  
8pm, Thursday 14 June  
The Studio

# Desert Island Discs – first members’ night

## Friday 13 April: Desert Island Discs

You nominate the two tracks you would take to your desert island and we ask you about why this music is important to you etc. You can bring them on CD or USB if you want - but we have Spotify, so you shouldn't need to.

It's all very gentle and respectful but you won't know the questions upfront. You also get to take a book and a luxury to take along so think about that too.

If you've ever wanted to be on Desert Island Discs (and who hasn't?!) this is your big chance.



## Friday 25 May: Inside the Actors Studio

You remember this programme from a few years ago where James Lipton asked big stars about their background, their inspirations and their thoughts on acting? Well this is a bit similar - we've invited two professional actors to join us plus two experienced amateur actors. You get to ask most of the questions and then you get a chance to chat informally with our guests after the show.

## Friday 15 June: Whose Line is it Anyway?

Another TV format. If you've ever wanted to learn precisely how to improvise and improvise well, this is the night for you. An expert improviser will be showing you simple tricks that'll have you improvising like a pro in no time. Then we'll be asking some of you (those that want to - the rest can be the audience) to play 'Whose Line is it Anyway?' You are as welcome to watch as to participate!

We want to get going with regular members nights again. This will be a chance to meet together while at the same time doing something theatre-related.

Each session aims to last about two hours at most, so hopefully you will

begin to put the date in your diary ahead of time and look forward to it. I've chosen a range of activities that should appeal to everyone taking us through the next three months.

Entry for each one is FREE, and each also includes a free glass of wine to fire

up those creative juices and make the evening go with a swing.

So please come along. Bring friends too and make a night of it. We want you to have lots of fun and enjoy being together with like-minded people!

Rory

## Bancroft Players' 200 Club

Back to my short reports as I have been off on my travels again. So, all I have to say this month is congratulations to our winners.

### March Winners

£25: Tom Power  
£20: Leslie Simpkins  
£15: Brian Seal  
£10: Andrew Carmichael

Paula Downes

# SAVE THE DATE



**Bancroft Players' AGM,  
Thursday 14 June, 8pm  
The Studio**

Up next on the Main Stage and in The Studio

# Life on the edge with Big Spirit

**I** *Don't Like Mondays* is a verbatim-style play by Big Spirit's favourite playwright, Rob Hughes.

Rob, an ex-Big Spiriter himself, has produced a timely and disturbing production about a shooting in an American High School.

Initially you are not sure who, out of the 20 or so students, will be the one who flips. The final scenes are at once harrowing and poignant.

Rob in his writing and the youth theatre, under the direction of Katie Milward, find very real characters who you will recognise and understand. And, crucially, it provides some answers as to why a few students in a few schools commit such an horrendous crime.

It's a wonderful play that I think deserves the widest possible audience. Very Big Spirit!

Rory



## I Don't Like Mondays

By "Jack Stacey", Directed by Katie Milward

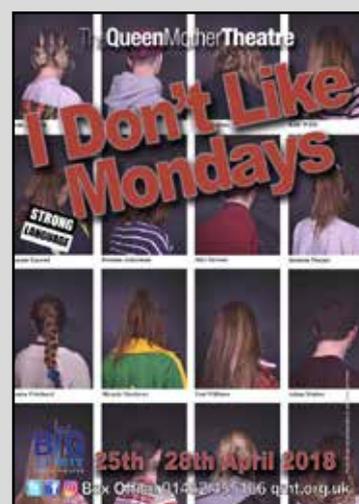
*'Marco was never a popular kid. He was always a little different to his classmates at school and struggled to fit in with them. He wasn't sure what to do about that, so ...*

This hard-hitting, verbatim-style play takes as its theme the very contemporary subject of school shootings in the USA. By turns heart-rending and wry, like classic Greek tragedy it focuses on the fragile security of everyday life and how easily it can be broken.

Strong writing, strong acting –very Big Spirit

Age advice: 12 years (strong language and descriptive content)

Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> April at 7.45pm in the Main Theatre



## Spring Awakening

Book and lyrics by Steven Sater

Music by Duncan Sheik

Based on the play by Frank Wedekind

Big Spirit Youth Theatre presents this unnerving, entertaining, funny and dark musical play about youth which caused riots when it exploded onto the stage in 1906 and has lost none of its provocative power.

Brought bang up to date, this new version examines the exuberance, intensity and confusion of teenage life today. *Spring Awakening* asks important and pressing questions about how young people are shaped for their future by a generation that doesn't understand them.

Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> May in The Richard Whitmore Studio



# More behind-the-scenes work to transform theatre

*Emma Saunders reports on the latest efforts to create a better working environment at the QMT.*

On 7th April we held another work party to transform the Green Room following the installation of the new kitchen area.

A team of eight of us cleared, painted, drilled and moved furniture to give the room a fresh look and relaxing feel. We hope you agree that this has improved the space.

But we didn't stop there! Andrew did a fantastic job of clearing up the paint store area.

Some discarded props were returned to their rightful home in the props store, and the dressing rooms were given a tidy.

We also acquired a smart filing cabinet to replace the rickety old desk hiding by the



*Emma Saunders (front left) and her team enjoy a well-earned break*

photocopier at the back of the auditorium, which can be used to help keep that area tidy.

Finally, the stage manager's area was given a spruce up, with the dock door, props table and surrounding being painted black, and installing a new desk, clock and timer for use by stage managers for future shows.

Thanks to David and Helen for making flat pack furniture construction look so easy.

All achieved while enjoying catching up with friends: a Saturday well spent in my opinion.

Thanks again to Alisha, Andrea, Andrew, Clive, David, Helen, Keith and Mike.

*Emma Saunders*



# What works for me... WORKING WITH MUSIC

**I**n 'Quartet', the next show in the Main Theatre, four aging opera singers attempt to recapture their glory years with a performance of Verdi's 'Rigoletto' that the passage of time has left them ill-equipped to tackle. Rehearsals have offered several interesting challenges for director Elliott Bunker and his vastly experienced cast.

Despite plenty of experience singing on stage, they have had to learn new techniques to convincingly portray world-class opera stars. New ways of breathing and moving, the correct pronunciation of the opera's Italian words, even a performance-level understanding of 'Rigoletto' itself - and all without being allowed to sing a note, for reasons that can't be revealed without spoiling the plot...

Here, the cast share some of their experiences preparing for the show while their director gives his top tips for directing a show with music.

## Helen Huson

We've all sung on stage before, but how you present yourself when playing an opera singer is different. You are always theatrical, never half-hearted, you're always throwing your arms about, gesturing and doing something. As it's a foreign language, the audience have to tell from your gestures and facial expressions - and, being the finale, there's got to be the wow factor.

## Charles Plester

Music is like a third actor, it takes some of the pressure off. It will suggest a mood and allow you to underplay far more, even in a large theatre. For example, in *Amadeus* you just listen to the music and your face will naturally give the joy or dismay. In *History Boys* Posner singing 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered' shows he's in love with Dakin - without any lines, we've understood. Nowhere until the second act does anyone mention his love, but the audience knows because he's sung this song.

## Elliott Bunker (director)

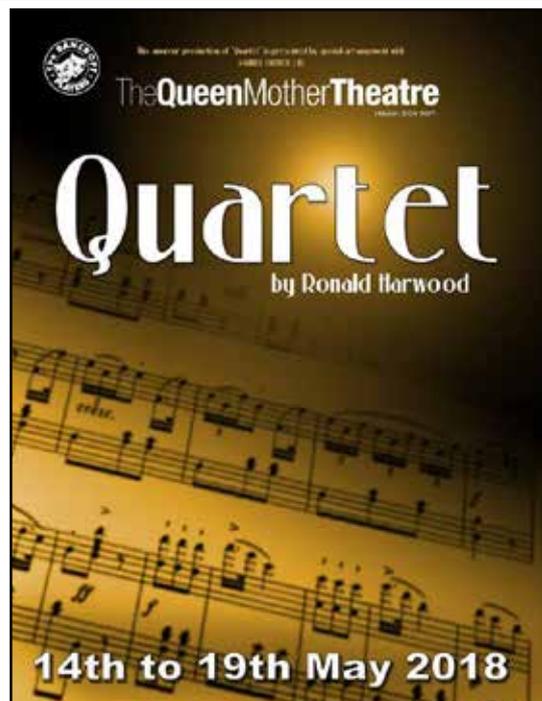
Use music sparingly when you're directing, and never choose your final music until you've watched your play. You'll probably find your initial choices of tracks aren't necessarily the right ones - they don't work as well as you thought they might. Your actors will bring something and your music should enhance that, or propel the story. The only song I never change is my opening song, because that sets the whole mood of the production.



Above: Elliott Bunker and Charles Plester in 'The Ladykillers'. Below: Alison Hancock in 'The Last of the Haussmans'.



**'Quartet' runs from May 14-19.  
Tickets from [qmt.org.uk](http://qmt.org.uk)  
or the Box Office.**



## Brian Seal

The interesting thing is that we've had two sessions on the music, where music hasn't come into it. We had one session on Italian pronunciation and one session on how to breathe and look as if you're projecting a sound to the back of a large concert hall. We've been working on technique, rather than setting music, which is different for me. I got into theatre from a rock group - and it's all sore throats with a rock group. This is completely different.

## Alison Hancock

I made a crib sheet with a crash course in Italian pronunciation to help everyone understand the mouth shapes when lip syncing. We have to make everything look authentic - whatever I'm doing on stage, I want to make it ring true for that character and setting, otherwise I can't step in and inhabit that character. Our characters understand the story of *Rigoletto* and what drives the characters they play, so we have to keep listening to the music, becoming familiar with it and understanding the emotions behind what they sing. And in fact, opera is incredibly repetitive - very short little verses and you just repeat them and repeat them and repeat them. I'm playing the soprano, and she's just warbling one word across the width of the page.

# Andy Darley: “Finding two healthy young brains I could use wasn’t easy”

Recent Studio success ‘The Effect’ featured extensive video projections to help build the atmosphere of a medical trials unit. Projected images, both still and moving, have long been a feature of live theatre sometimes in a Brechtian sense, or to create a dizzying setting, as in Andrew Lloyd Webber’s ‘Woman in White’, or to reinforce the themes of the play, for example in the work of Complicite. Rosemary Bianchi asked Andy Darley, video designer for ‘The Effect’, for his personal views on using projected imagery.

“I think most plays would be damaged by video,” says Andy Darley. “It would break the illusion.”

The designer of the videos and images used in *The Effect* is already developing new material for a future QMT play, but reckons his work should be used sparingly – if at all.

He said: “Theatre is strange and wonderful in that you don’t stop being aware of the people around you but, at the same time, you are immersed in another world and everything that happens on stage should feed that illusion.

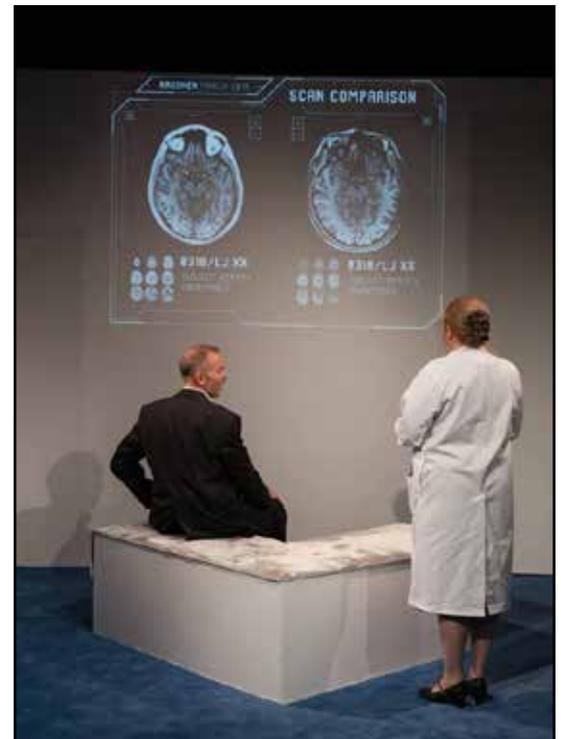
“Video could disrupt that, so the video designer’s only thought must be ‘How will this add to the play, rather than distract from it?’

“If people come away talking about the video effects, you have failed. They should be talking about the characters.

“How do I work? Well I try something, see if it works. If it does, good. If it doesn’t, try again, gradually building up technique and knowledge. It’s amazing to discover what you can do with easily-available software, and I was delighted to have a chance to put what I’d learned into practice.”

Andy said he recognised the possibilities in *The Effect* when it was first announced at the Directors’ Evening. As well as auditioning, he offered his help with the video work to director Sam Powell.

Liaising closely with Sam, he sourced a mix of free resources and commercial templates that he combined with original work to create *The Effect*’s introductory video, Stroop Test slides, dosage notifications, MRI scans and high-tech patient records.



*Doug Brooker and Alison Hudson discuss their volunteers’ brain scans - the believability of this slide was essential to maintain the illusion of reality, said Andy. Photo: Julian Newman Turner.*

He said: “One set of effects had to show MRI scans of brains but the problem was that they had to show two different healthy brains. Commercial stock footage was far too expensive, and there were any amount of video scans of diseased brains available on YouTube, but fortunately there were also a couple of rights-free scans of young healthy brains.

“It was a complex, detailed and time-consuming task and, to be honest, I was still putting the finishing touches to the final effect – an adaptation of a Star Wars lightsaber effect to make a scanner beam – about 30 minutes before the first performance.”



*Left: Volunteers including Big Spirit’s Charlie Preston and Seb Creasey provided photos for use as the other unseen trial participants. Centre: Andy at work creating an MRI scan sequence. Right: The finished sequence combines with the actors’ performances and Andrew Castell’s lighting design to take the audience right inside the trial clinic. Photos: LJ Hutchins, Julian Newman Turner.*

# 'Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons': thought-provoking play asks 'what are words worth?'

The Newsletter Team was privileged to sit in on the first read-through of Sam Steiner's *Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons*, the next Bancroft Players production in The Studio, writes Rosemary Bianchi.

Watching the characters coming to life for the first time, we can report that the audience is in for a real treat as this two-hander had us roaring with laughter one minute and pondering deeper issues the next.

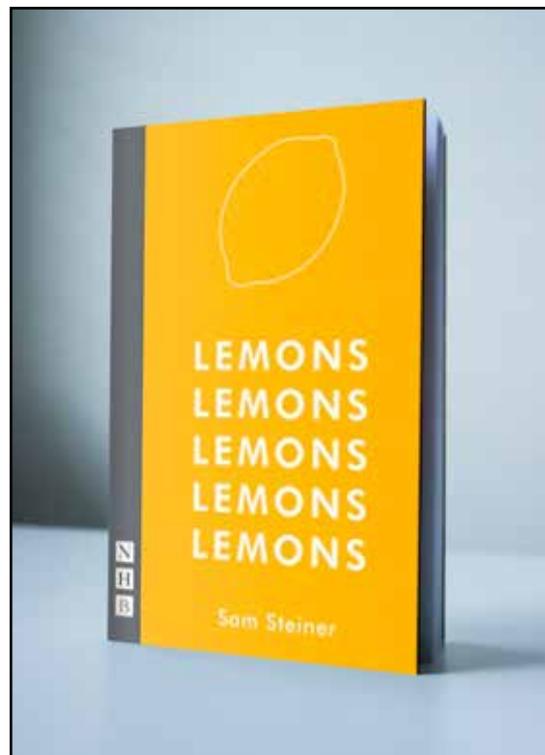
We asked director Russell Hurn for his thoughts on the play, his first directing job at the QMT.

He said: "*Lemons* is about words, communication and relationships. It poses many questions, such as do we pay attention to the words we use every day? What if words were a finite resource? Would they be squandered on daily frivolities or become the messengers of true love and wisdom? Could we find new ways to express our feelings, needs and wants? If every word counted, what would you want to say?"

"This thought-provoking play questions our relationships and the way we communicate in the modern world. It will stir you to think about the things you say every day - whether it is more important to ask for a drink in the pub, or to tell your partner that you love them.

"The characters Oliver and Bernadette are faced with this dilemma as the government introduces the 'Hush' Bill, a verbal rationing of 140 words per day. 'Good morning', 'goodnight' and 'I love you' are five. What would you say with the other 135?"

*Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons* by Sam Steiner is in The Richard Whitmore Studio from 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> June.



## Cast, Creatives and Crew:

**Bernadette:** Emily Miles  
**Oliver:** Gabs Rodriguez-Cleary  
**Director:** Russell Hurn  
**Assistant Director:** Liz Pybus  
**Lighting Design:** Alan Bailes  
**Set Design:** Rosemary Bianchi  
**Video Projection Design:** Andy Darley  
**Stage Manager:** Louis Horn  
**ASM:** Luke Hutchings

# Casting news: 'Midsummer Night's Dream'

Here is the cast for the BP's June production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. There were separate auditions for the Youth Theatre so the cast given below represents the full complement of the company. Everyone who came along has been cast and you will each get their moment of glory - no one is in the cast just as dressing.

Rory

## LOVERS

**Lysander:** Charlie Preston  
**Demetrius:** Seb Creasey & Ewan Morris  
**Hermia:** Ylana Schafer & Ella Burns  
**Helena:** Molly Hughes & Georgia Head

## COURT

**Egeus:** Hannah Rodriguez-Johnson  
**Theseus:** Matt Gray  
**Hippolyta:** Vicky Wonham  
**Philostrate:** Sian Lawrence & Isabel Lawther  
**Court:** Emily Green, Lauren Tilbrook, Grace Maynard

## THE 'MECHANICALS'

**Nick Bottom:** Gareth Martin  
**Peter Quince:** Charles Plester  
**Francis Flute:** Ash Smith & Tige Burns  
**Robin Starveling:** Jade Newman Turner & Emma Fisher  
**Tom Snout:** Louis Bailey & Andrew Robinson  
**Snug:** Leo Stewart & Zara Schafer  
**Other Mechanicals:** Sue Mason, Mark Castell, Oak MacWilliam

## THE FAIRY FOLK

**Puck:** Sam Bailey & Amy Shields  
**Oberon:** Divyesh Thakerar  
**Titania:** Claudia O'Connell  
**First fairy:** Emily Smith & Molly Astill  
**Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, Mustardseed and members of the fairy band:** James Skull, Stan Taunt, Violet Morris, Grace Phillips, Lily Simkiss, Tia Shenton

## Who's who in the Bancroft Players

<b>Executive Committee</b> 2017 to 2018	Diary Organiser <i>Edith Pratt</i>
Richard Whitmore <i>President Emeritus</i>	Fire Officer <i>Chris Lane</i>
Frank Pratt <i>President</i>	First Aid Officer <i>Paula Downes</i>
Les Edwards <i>Chairman</i>	Front of House Manager <i>Paula Downes</i>
Susan Mellor <i>Secretary</i>	Health & Safety Coordinator <i>David Hillelson</i>
Tim Hallas <i>Treasurer</i>	Junior Theatre Group <i>Alison Hudson</i>
Rory Reynolds <i>Artistic Director</i>	Keys Distributor <i>David Lester</i>
Nicki Pope <i>Production Manager (Main Theatre)</i>	Licensing Manager <i>Tim Hallas</i>
David Lester <i>Production Manager (Studio)</i>	Membership <i>Edith Pratt</i>
Chris Lane <i>Theatre Manager</i>	Newsletter <i>Rosemary Bianchi</i>
Julian Newman Turner <i>Business Manager</i>	Properties <i>Audrey Hawkins, Julie Chamberlain</i>
David Borner <i>Committee Member</i>	Publicity Manager <i>Julian Newman Turner</i>
Charlotte Ryan <i>Committee Member</i>	Refreshments/Stewards <i>Lyn Bryars, Mo Mutton</i>
Emma Saunders <i>Committee member</i>	Set & Design Manager <i>Rosemary Bianchi</i>
Zara Schafer <i>Committee Member</i>	Technical Manager <i>Alan Bailes</i>
<b>Appointments</b> 2017 to 2018	Workshop Coordinator <i>Clive Hall</i>
Vice-Chairman <i>Chris Lane</i>	Wardrobe Liaison <i>Sally Hull</i>
Box Office Manager <i>Vacant</i>	Welfare: <i>Vacant</i>
Bar Manager <i>Vacant</i>	What's On Distribution <i>Susan Mellor</i>
Bar Committee <i>Frank Pratt</i>	Youth Theatre Group <i>Rory Reynolds</i>
Bar Rota <i>Mark Castell</i>	200 Club <i>Paula Downes</i>
Bookings Manager <i>Edith Pratt (evening), Keith Crook (day)</i>	

### Newsletter: Last date for copy

Items for publication should be submitted to the editors at newsletterqmt@live.com no later than the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month. We aim to publish the next issue by the 26<sup>th</sup> of the month.



## Writers' Group prepares for monologue-fest

*Closing date for entries and revised date for show announced*

The two QMT Writers' Groups held a joint session in March, with youth and adult writers sharing work and developing ideas together.

Both groups are working towards a monologue evening in the Main Theatre, where QMT actors will perform their work before judges.

The revised date for this event is now **June 2** - anyone interested in performing should contact Rory at bigspirittheatre@hotmail.com.

The deadline for entries is **April 20**, sent to Sally Abbott (sallyabbott@me.com) and Rory (address above) with 'monologue' as the subject line.

## C4 comedy features familiar QMT faces

Have you been watching Channel 4's *Lee and Dean*? The comedy by writing duo Mark O'Sullivan and Miles Chapman is great for spotting familiar local places and faces including several from the QMT! Will we ever forget Natalie Gordon dancing the night away in her mobility scooter? And as for the Premier Inn, Hitchin! Nuff said! Rumour has it that our own QMT has a starring role this Friday, and will feature many local celebs, including that grande dame of poetry, Edith Pratt. Unmissable!

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

**Club Night:**  
**Desert Island Discs**  
(Richard Whitmore Studio)  
April 13

**Deadline: Monologue-fest entry submissions**  
April 20

**Playwriting Group**  
(John Coxall Room)  
7.30pm, April 24

**I Don't Like Mondays**  
*Big Spirit*  
(Main Theatre)  
April 25 - 28

**Spring Awakening**  
*Big Spirit*  
(Richard Whitmore Studio)  
May 10 - 12

**Quartet**  
(Main Theatre)  
May 14 - 19

**Club Night:**  
**Inside the Actor's Studio**  
May 25

**Playwriting Group**  
**Monologue-fest**  
(Main Theatre)  
June 2

**Lemons Lemons Lemons**  
**Lemons Lemons**  
(Richard Whitmore Studio)  
June 6 - 9