

The Bancroft Players

Newsletter
April 2019



The truth is revealed as Edmund discovers Bob's secret. Rory Reynolds, Fay Worboys and the rest of Sally Hull's cast delighted sell-out audiences with their recreation of TV classic Blackadder. Photo: Juulian Newman Turner

Tickets on sale now at www.qmt.org.uk for:

Oedipus & Antigone

By Sophocles.

April 3-6

"The two greatest tragedies of the classic period... could not be more compelling."



We Happy Few

By Imogen Stubbs.

May 6-11

"By far and away the funniest and saddest backstage play for half a century." Daily Express



The QMT



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The Richard Whitmore
STUDIO

Queen Mother Theatre, Woodside, Hitchin, SG4 9SP. 01462 434875, box office 01462 455166. Reg charity no: 283439.



“What newsletter? Oh, THAT newsletter.” Brian Seal as the Minstrel in Blackadder pronounces a death sentence on the March edition. Photo: Julian Newman Turner.

Whatever happened to the March newsletter?

As you may have noticed, we weren't able to produce a March members' newsletter.

This was because a key member of the team that publishes the newsletter changed their work circumstances and couldn't spend their usual amount of hours on it during February or March.

We all want to apologise for the inconvenience caused to anyone looking for information about shows, diary dates and auditions. We're already planning how we can come up with new arrangements to stop it happening in future months.

Like all of the QMT, the newsletter is volunteer-run - and the problem in March highlights what can

happen if just one key volunteer is temporarily unavailable.

The pages of this newsletter often carry pleas for more people to get involved in the day-to-day running of the Bancroft Players.

The more people who offer a few hours a month, the easier it is to manage all sorts of activities - not just the newsletter, but essential functions such as the bar, front of house, and interval coffees.

So, if you've been thinking about volunteering for a while but haven't quite taken the plunge, why not do it now? The time commitment can be as great or little as you want, and you'll find a terrific community waiting to greet you.

Recent shows at the QMT

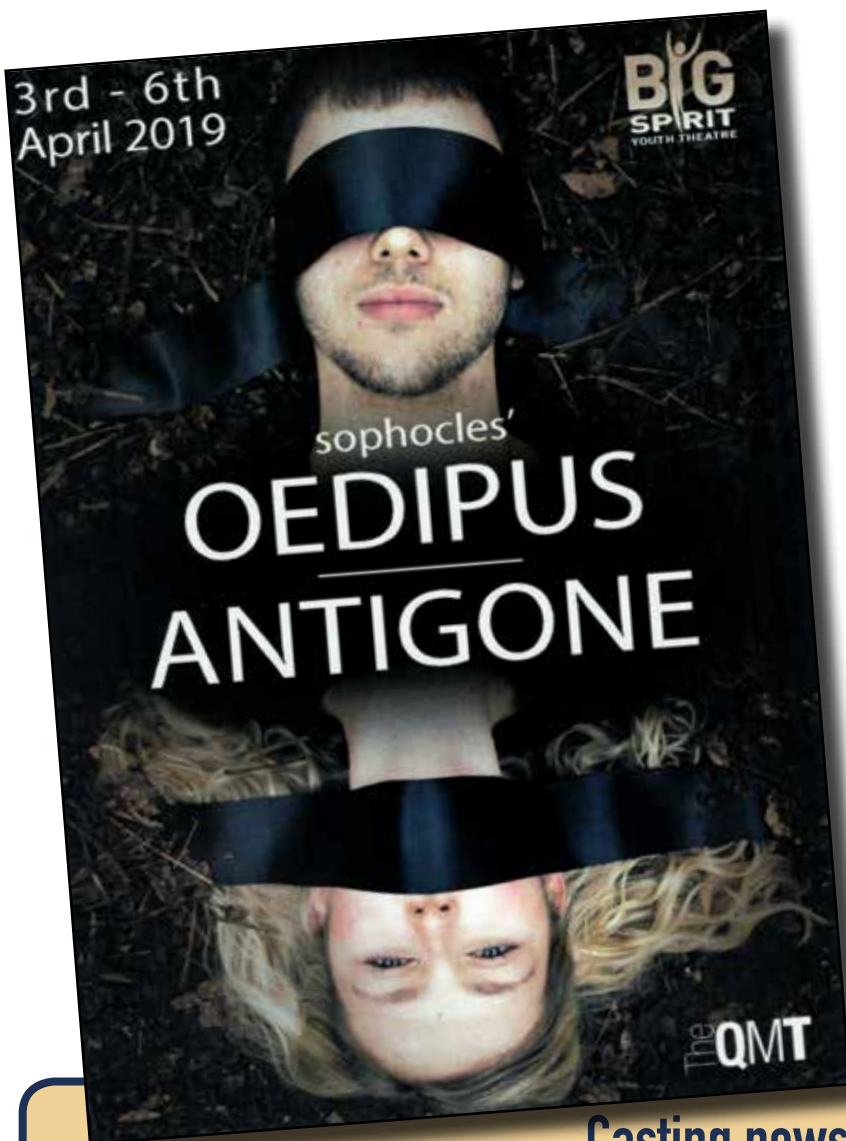
Constellations



Blackadder: the Tudor Years



All photos by Julian Newman Turner



Compelling classic tragedy from Big Spirit

Perhaps the two greatest tragedies of the classic period are being performed by Big Spirit on 3rd-6th April

First, Oedipus looks for the killer of the previous ruler, Laius, despite dire warnings it will destroy his family. Then, in the second part, we meet Oedipus' daughter Antigone, who proves herself stronger than anyone when she faces her brutal uncle Creon, the new leader of the state.

The two stories could not be more compelling and in this modern translation the themes of what it is to be good and what it is to do the right thing clash in an unforgettable way.

If you think you don't like classic theatre then you clearly have not seen Big Spirit at work - their energy, their commitment and their ability to engage you will stay with you long after the show has finished.

Rory Reynolds

Oedipus and Antigone, by Sophocles. Wed 3 - Sat 6 April. Tickets: Box Office or qmt.org.uk.

Casting news

'We Happy Few'

Henrietta Oakes: Alison Hancock
Flora Pelmet: Emma O'Connell
Helen Irving: Sue Mason
Rosalind Roberts: Merrin Sharples-Moore
Jocelyn Tripp: Barbie Gardiner
Charlotte Peters: Amy Walker
Ivy Williams: Emily Miles
Reggie Pelmet: Andrew Stiles
Joseph Rosenbaum: Ewan Morris
Wilhelm Rosenbaum: Keith Crook

Other roles: Keith Warren, Clare Bailey

'Anne Boleyn'

Anne Boleyn: Terri Hyde
Henry VIII: Gabs Rodriguez-Cleary
Thomas Cromwell: Keith Swainston
Cardinal Wolsey: Graeme Bussey
King James I: Harry Harding
Robert Cecil: Matt Gray
George Villiers: Ben Chennells
Tyndale: David Hillelson
Parrot: TBC / doubled

Dean Andrews: Adrian Laycock
Dr Reynolds: Ian Mutton
Henry Barrow: Craig Maddox
Lady Rochford: Lucy Walton
Lady Celia: Caroline Ness
Lady Jane: Amy Walker
Attendant to Anne: Emily Green
Simpkin: Craig Maddox
Sloop: Russell Hurn
Country People (speaking): Amy Walker, Janet Pentecost, Ben Chennells, other cast members as available

MEANWHILE, BACKSTAGE... By MATT GRAY



SPOILER ALERT

Bancroft Players' 200 Club

Another one of my brief reports, you lucky people! The usual information should you feel the urge to contact me and a list of the March winners. For further information on the 200 Club please contact me on either 07778 014428 or paula.downes@ntlworld.com.

March Winners

£25: Marilyn Warmingier
 £20: Janet Houghton
 £15: Andrew Piggott
 £10: Carole Humphreys

Paula Downes

constellations

The disruption in the newsletter production schedule meant we were unable to run our previews for 'Constellations', directed by Grace Reinhold-Gittins in The Studio at the beginning of March. The show earned plenty of praise, including for the staging and for the way Grace handled the potentially-confusing alternate timelines explored by her cast. Here's the interview with her we did beforehand but haven't been able to publish until now.

Why did this play appeal to you?

The thing that sold Constellations for me when I first read it was how you've got the same two people and the same situations, but each time it's done very differently.

I think that shows how every single day we have a kind of tunnel vision that affects how we speak to people. We only take in so much information every day and so we're not fully aware of how we're treating people around us, particularly the people who are closest to us.

And the idea that there's all these infinite possibilities, based on whether we say one thing or another, means it's a real study of the complexities of maintaining and nourishing relationships.

What do you think an audience will take away from it?

I think an audience will find the story quite refreshing. Although it's based on two specific characters, people can see themselves in Roland and Marianne and their relationship, and they can go away realising things they can all identify with and can apply to any relationship, whether it's friendship or romance.

What was your purpose in how you staged the play?

The set very much becomes a part of the audience. They walk in and they see constellations on the walls, glowing stars on the floor and platform and Edison bulbs shining above the platform - they are very

much immersed in the stars and the action. Also it's in a thrust stage so you can't get any closer!

How did you find the experience as a first-time director?

As it's my first time directing, I started off thinking 'I need to do something simple'. Constellations has two cast members, but it isn't simple and I've had to keep on the pace with all the challenges, for example finding a British Sign Language expert.

It's been more difficult than I expected, but that's made it a bit more of an accomplishment because we have all had to work very hard. I have absolutely loved it and I'm very glad to direct this as my first production.

Annabelle Mackinnon-Austin and Scott Henderson in Grace Reinhold-Gittins' production of Nick Payne's 'Constellations'. Photo: Julian Newman Turner.



What works for me... CAPTURING THE PAST

'We Happy Few', the next show in the Main House, is set during the 1940s and is based on the true story of an all-female theatre troupe staging Shakespeare's classics to boost morale in the dark days of World War II. Charles Plester's cast ranges from veterans for whom the war is a living memory, to young actors who know it only from history books. We spoke to them to find out the different techniques they're using to capture that 40s feeling.

Alison Hancock

As this play is based on a true story I've been able to look up background information on the troupe and the woman my character is based on. Hettie is brisk and driven, and she says to the group "stop pausing between words, we're not Americans". It's that upper-class, clipped way of speaking I remember from my youth watching these old films set in the forties - *Genevieve*, and Kenneth More playing Douglas Bader.

Sue Mason

It's an organic process. You find the character first, then through the script you find the period - it should be there in the writing. You get to know your character and what you will do to portray them, but then everything is very much of a time and place. It depends on what you're doing - it's all very different in comedy or high drama or physical theatre - but your movement is very important, the way people spoke was different, and clothing helps a lot.

Andrew Sills

I use my experiences of talking to my grandparents, and the discussions we had about the war and how it impacted on everybody in the country, to build a connection with the time period. In the early stages of rehearsals you've got to be playful with a character and try things out - that's how you find a purposeful character that works for the company.

Amy Walker

Music is a powerful way of capturing a period in time. Also, research about women's lives and what happened in the war when men were off fighting - the greater freedom and responsibilities they had. It was an interesting period of time for women - the war changed everything for them and they refused to change back.

Barbie Gardiner

The character I'm playing is quite eccentric so looking at eccentric actresses of that period like Margaret Rutherford helped a great deal. Finding something to wear of that period also helps tremendously - a pair of shoes or a hat. And, because I'm of a certain age, I can remember stories and accounts from my parents and family.

Clare Bailey

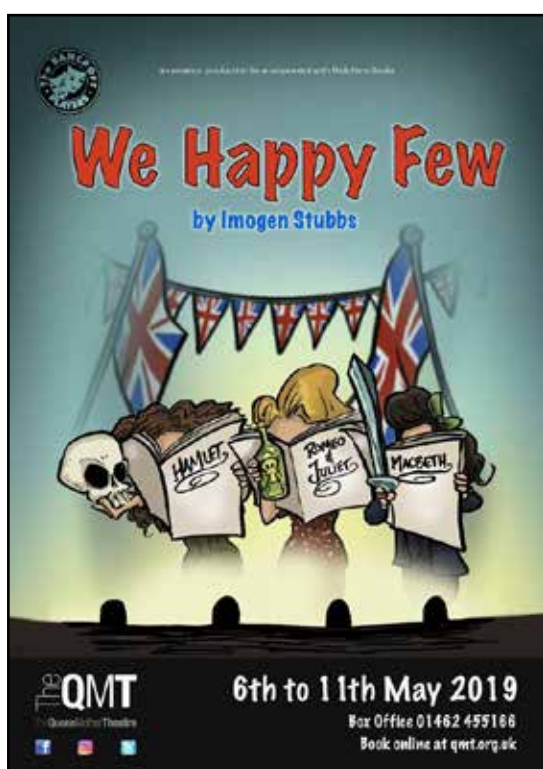
I do like the old music, and watching films from the forties, that sort of period - a bit of *Gracie Fields*, *Ealing Comedies*, things like that. It gives an idea of how people spoke, because they spoke so differently from now. It was a more genteel way of expressing yourself.

Ewan Morris

It was a totally different culture, so I look for similarities today so I can find the mindset. My character is a refugee and you can see the desperation of people suffering war in the Middle East in news reports. It helps me understand people going on boats and crossing the Channel, as he did.

Keith Crook

I don't have many lines but I play the piano. Cole Porter, Gershwin, Irving Berlin - we play them now exactly as they wrote them years ago. Musically there is nothing different, it's time-honoured. I lived through the war, so it's a bit difficult to say what I'm doing differently for this show. It was a very, very hard time but we all struggled through somehow. Everybody mucked in.



'We Happy Few': 6-11 May in the Main House.
Tickets from Box Office on 01462 455166 or www.qmt.org.uk

Was it coincidence - or was it written that way?

Well Spring is in the air and now is the time to look forward to all the treats in store. There's *Oedipus & Antigone* of course with our wonderful youth theatre, then there's *We Happy Few* directed by the closest thing we have to a national treasure - Charles Plester.

And then there's *Bea* in the Studio (in June), not forgetting our final show of the season, *Anne Boleyn*, directed by the irrepressible Nicki Pope.

If you think about it, this is such a rich selection of shows all on your doorstep. I came out of Studio last night after watching *Constellations* (perfectly directed by Grace Reinhold-Gittins) and I thought 'if I'd seen that at the Trafalgar Studios in London, it couldn't have been any better!'

Of course you might say I'm biased, but I honestly try not to be. Here at the

QMT we ask our directors to produce the shows of the highest quality and I think we're rarely disappointed on that score.

I also recently caught *Equus* at Stratford East - a play I tried desperately to get the rights to perform recently and failed 'cos of this national tour. It was fabulous of course but by the time I'd got to the theatre I was frazzled and then I didn't get back to Hitchin until 12.30am. It was all totally worth it but such a hassle!

I was pleased to share the photos of the Dell during construction in 1951 in the last issue and it sort of came up trumps as I was immediately contacted about some other people anxious to re-open the space for theatrical events. Oh good - here's hoping...

And finally - what are your views on synchronicity - the phenomenon of

coincidences that maybe are a bit too odd to be sheer chance?

On Saturday someone asked about the production of *Equus* which I directed in 1985. I duly got out a photo showing the cast and then who should wander into the foyer but the lead in that production, Richard Clothier.

Richard is now a well-known Shakespearean actor with the RSC and he also plays things like prime ministers in TV and film dramas. I haven't seen him for about 10 years and I have to report that he is still as annoyingly handsome as he was when I last saw him.

Still what are the chances, eh?

Here is that photo by way just in case you want to see who was in *Equus* all those years ago.

Rory

Equus, by Peter Shaffer. directed by Rory Reynolds, 15-23 March 1985. Richard Clothier (seated) and some of the cast. Full cast (as listed in Keith Crook's Bancroft Players history): Martin Dysart - Ken Walsh; Nurse - Sheila Soothill; Heather Salomon - Jenny Rushbrook; Alan Strang - Richard Clothier; Dora Strang - Joan Goodwin; Frank Strang - Don Hocking; Horseman - Keith Swainston; Harry Dalton - Frank Ash; Jill Mason - Liz Cole; Horses - Rosemary Bianchi, David Schaal, Amanda Hadingue, Ian Thompson, William Heaton.

