



# The Bancroft Players

## Newsletter

### February 2017



Georgina Bennett and Harry Harding walked the fine line between genius and madness in David Auburn's *Proof*, directed by Tamsin Goodwin Connelly.

### Rory Reynolds

## Comic? Horrific? Thrilling? All of them, of course!

Recognise this? Scene: *The waiting room at Fal Vale, a small branch railway station in Cornwall. The room presents a most depressing scene: the fire in the grate is smoky and the single gas lamp throws gloomy shadows. Outside the rain falls heavily...*

Sounds a bit like my last year's holiday! In fact it's the opening scene description of *Ghost Train*. Director David Lester has set the play in the round so the whole audience feel they are in this damned place - and then creepy things start to happen.

It's a comedy-horror-thriller by Arnold Ridley (from *Dad's Army*) and it works on all levels - genuinely scary when it's supposed to be and droll too. Come along and see -

you'll have a good night out!

I'm still getting over *Proof*, our last Studio show which was directed by Tamsin Goodwin-Connelly. It was such a smart play and so beautifully acted that I immediately wanted to go back and watch it all over again. Well done guys!

I can't believe it but we're looking to cast the last shows of the season in the next few weeks - where does the time go? (If you do know please alert Prof Stephen Hawking, he's been asking that question in physics for years).

Next to be cast is *Pronoun* to be directed by my Youth Theatre sidekick, Barney Taylor (in the Studio) and then Terence Rattigan's *Flare Path* under the skilled directorial baton of Nicki

### Artistic Director's blog

Pope. And that, apart from Youth Theatre classics such as *The History Boys*, *Legally Blonde - The Musical* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, is about it. Phew!

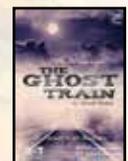
I hope you've been studying your crammed *What's On* and find yourself suitably staggered at the range and number of shows we offer here at the good old Queen Mother Theatre. The only thing that limits us really is the support we need to keep this great venture going. Please, please, please offer to help in some way, even if you aren't in a particular show. You'll have a great time, meet some lovely people and feel part of something truly innovative and exciting! Hope to see you very soon!

Rory

### COMING SOON:



**Double Trouble**  
(Juniors production)  
8 - 10 February,  
Main theatre.



**The Ghost Train**  
24 February - 4 March  
Main theatre.



**hang**  
15-18 March,  
Richard Whitmore Studio.



# Flare Path

*“Superb – a three handkerchief weepie that somehow manages to be profoundly moving and wonderfully funny”*

*“A tribute to the collective spirit of wartime bomber crews and their partners”*

*“A deeply moving portrait of people at war”*

*“A shattering ensemble work in which every detail glows with truth, compassion and humanity, and where every seemingly ordinary second of life in an existence hemmed in by the ever-present threat of death is charged with humanity”*

The play is set during the Second World War in a hotel on the Lincolnshire coast, where aircrew from a nearby RAF airbase hope to spend the weekend with their wives.

Patricia Graham, an actress from London, has something to tell her bomber pilot husband Teddy. The situation is complicated when Hollywood film star Peter Kyle arrives at the hotel and Teddy is sent out on a dangerous night raid over Germany. Patricia is torn between a rekindled old flame and loyalty to her war hero husband.

Teddy's tail Gunner, 'Dusty' Miller, is awaiting his wife Maudie, who is late. Maudie has only a short time off from the laundry where she has worked since the war began. She was bombed out of their home in the Blitz, but says matter-of-factly “there's a war on, and things have got to be a bit different, and we've just got to get used to it – that's all”.

Doris waits for her husband Count Skriczevinsky, a Polish pilot serving with the RAF. His wife and son were killed by the Nazis and he came to Britain, despite his poor command of the English language, to join the war against Germany. Doris met him while working as a barmaid and, though she is now his Countess, worries about what will happen when the war is over and he is able to return to Poland.

Also present at the hotel are the proprietor, Mrs. Oakes; Percy, a young waiter who is interested in RAF operations; and an airman named Corporal Wiggy Jones (a very small walk on part).

Soon after everyone has arrived, Squadron Leader 'Gloria' Swanson summons the men back to base for an unscheduled night operation and their wives are left to await their return. Swanson remains at the hotel and, as he and Patricia watch the flare path from the hotel window, one of the aircraft is destroyed on take-off by the Luftwaffe – but whose is it?



## THE DETAILS:

**By:** Terence Rattigan, director Nicki Pope.

**Auditions:** Tue 7 & Thu 9 March, 7.45pm

**Performances:** 19 - 24 June

**Rehearsals:** Tue & Thu at 7.45pm, Sun am closer to run. Full commitment required the week before show & at Get In/Out.

At rehearsals we will block the play together and explore characters and relationships with each other. Hopefully they will be fun and we'll all work together as a team!

**Gender/age:** 7M/4F. Don't be put off by ages, it is more about the pairing of partners.

**Accents:** A mix of classes. RP for Teddy Graham & Swanson, Polish for the Count.

**Further information:** Nicki Pope at nicki@bigredfunbus.com

## THE ROLES:

**Doris, Countess Skriczevinsky:** 20s-30s, character part with some great speeches. Script says 'prone to being heavy', must have spirit and a glint in her eye: has overcome a lot! Sheridan Smith won an Olivier for this part.

**Peter Kyle:** Hollywood actor but English. Tall, smooth, sexy, well-spoken – think Cary Grant, Lawrence Olivier. Playing age, any: I am thinking 40-50ish.

**Patricia Graham:** Actress – not a leading lady but still well known. Attractive, well spoken and confused – in love with two men. Playing age 20s to 40s to match Teddy Graham. Sienna Miller played this part in the West End.

**Mrs Oakes:** The proprietor – grumpy, old / middle age. Great character part. Totally loyal to the servicemen.

**Sgt Dusty Miller:** Tail Gunner. Working class, brave. 20s-40s.

**Percy:** Works behind the bar. Young – too young or perhaps ill to go to war. 16-17. Good comedy part, he isn't the full shilling.

**Count Skriczevinsky:** Polish RAF pilot, very limited English. Heroic, handsome. Has to be able to pull off a Polish accent! Playing age 30s-50s, has to match Doris.

**Flt Lt Teddy Graham:** War hero – dashing, well-spoken RP English. Playing age 30-40ish – has to match Patricia.

**Maudie Miller:** Duty's wife. Working class, hardworking, honest, tough! 20s-40s to match Dusty.

**Sqn Ldr Swanson:** Upper Class, RP accent. Older - 50+.

**Cpl Wiggy Jones:** Very small walk-on part.

# Setting in place a train of events

Rosemary Bianchi previews the immersive staging of 'The Ghost Train' by Arnold Ridley, directed by David Lester. February 24 to March 4 in the Main Theatre.

On Saturday a workforce, fuelled by tea and custard creams and directed by set designer Dave Borner, will remove a large proportion of the stage in preparation for our next major production, *The Ghost Train*.

As those of you who have trodden our boards will know, the stage floor is built up of wooden rostra and was originally designed to provide flexible staging. Before the installation of the electrically operated rack of seating, it

was common for the QMT to host traverse, thrust and in-the-round productions and this is occasionally revived in Youth Theatre shows as well as productions such as *Hedda Gabler* and *The Seagull*.

*The Ghost Train* will go a step further by penetrating deeply into the current stage space thus allowing the audience to encircle the acting area on three sides. This will create an environment that is both intimate and epic, giving a sense of being present in the

room whilst being aware of the wild, unpredictable and potentially malevolent outdoors.

The show, which is rumoured to be one of the scariest plays ever performed, opens on Friday February 24 and runs to March 4. It will be the Bancroft Players' 400th public production and is directed by David Lester whose previous Bancroft Players' credits include *Noises Off*, *The Weir* and *God of Carnage*.



Alison Hudson giving advice and support to her young cast

## BP Juniors in 'Double Trouble' over tale of mistaken identity

As this newsletter went to press, Alison Hudson and her team were putting the finishing touches to the BP Juniors' version of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, titled *Double Trouble*.

Adapted by Alison and Kevin Hudson, it features the Bard's misplaced twins, endless mistaken identity mix-ups and lots of the familiar story.

More topically, we see characters popping off to 'Moonbucks'

for a coffee and some powerful references to the refugee crisis and strife between communities.

The show is performed by a company aged between seven and 13, with Big Spirit members lending musical assistance.

It runs in the main theatre for three nights, Wednesday February 8 to Friday February 10. Tickets from [qmt.org.uk](http://qmt.org.uk).

Andy Darley



## hang: a harrowing story of crime and punishment

Next up in The Studio is *hang*, written by Debbie Tucker Green and directed by Keith Swainston. A powerful story about our response to crime and how it should be punished, it runs from March 15 to 18. Special opening night offer: free glass of wine. Tickets from [qmt.org.uk](http://qmt.org.uk).

**Newsletter: Last date for copy:** Items for publication should be submitted to the editors at [newsletterqmt@live.com](mailto: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.

# All the world's a stage

In these politically interesting times Harpreet Gill looks at the use of theatre skills in public life.

In public life getting the political narrative 'out there' requires the use of many theatrical techniques, such as stage-setting, costumes, rehearsals and performance. High profile politicians often have a team of people behind them thinking about how to get the political narrative out to the people. The recent book by David Cameron's former Director of Communications Craig Oliver, *Unleashing Demons: The Inside Story of Brexit*, reveals just how much manpower is dedicated to this: lots. Here are a few examples of their use:

## Stage setting

Symbolic locations are often chosen to match the subject matter of the speech being delivered. For example, factories for a speech about the economy, schools when the issue is education reform. And the rise of the TV debate has increased the need for set design to frame the drama. In the recent US presidential debates the CNN set was designed on a large scale to make it feel presidential but also to have enough space between the lecterns to reinforce conflict.

## Costume

We are familiar with the suit and tie uniform of male politicians, which easily transforms into the 'we're getting on with the job' look – remove jacket and tie, roll up shirtsleeves. Interestingly Angela Merkel's look is low key: BBC journalist Katya Forman says her choice is often a sensible, boxy, three-button pantsuit in a spectrum of mumsy hues running from beige to purple. Classic, risk-averse and un-showy, the message is self-assurance and confidence – she has far more important things to deal with than her wardrobe.

## Playing away

Following Rory's encouragement to support local amateur theatre - which, with West End prices going stratospheric, is becoming the affordable way to access plays - we publish a roundup of upcoming shows in this area:

- Lytton Players: *James and the Giant Peach*, Lytton Theatre, Stevenage, Weds March 8 at 7.30pm
- Settlement Players: *Chase me up Farndale Avenue S'Il Vous Plait*, February 23-25 at The Settlement, Letchworth
- SPADS, Letchworth: *An Evening with SPADS*, March 2-4
- C.O.P.S, Hertford: *The Veil* by Conor McPherson March 31 - April 8 ([www.cops.org.uk](http://www.cops.org.uk))
- The Barn Theatre, Welwyn Garden City: *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, directed by Laura Eddy, February 17-24



## Performance

Then there is the live performance: the stage, the costume and the hard work put in at rehearsals should hopefully all come together and deliver a stellar performance of easily digestible media sound bites. But even well-trained politicians employ professional help to deliver a compelling performance. Margaret Thatcher famously took voice-coaching lessons to lower the pitch of her voice and move her accent from Lincolnshire to the Duchess of Devonshire, while George Osborne paid an expert in London's Harley Street £100 an hour to make himself sound less posh.

But much like live theatre there's still no guarantee that it'll go to plan. Welsh Assembly Member Andrew Davies told the 2016 Tory Party conference "we will make Breakfast a success" rather than Brexit. And the next stage performance will be 'The State Visit', starring the US President. However, the casting director is unsure if the lead actor is right for the part.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### *Double Trouble*

(Junior Bancroft Players, Main theatre)

8 - 10 February

### *The Ghost Train*

(Main theatre)

24 February - 4 March

### **Audition: Flare Path**

7 & 9 March

### **Playwriting group**

(meet in John Coxall Room)

28 February

### *hang*

(Richard Whitmore Studio)

15 - 18 March

### **Audition: Pronoun**

27 & 29 March

# Mark Castell: “Everything in life is a performance”

*An occasional series shining a spotlight on some of the unsung heroes whose work keeps the QMT running, in this edition we talk to the ever-helpful Mark Castell.*

Bar volunteer, set builder, stage crew member, actor - there are very few parts of QMT life that Mark Castell has not experienced during his 10 years at the theatre.

Whether on-stage, off, or serving up a pint, he sees a common link: “In a way, everything we do in life and every time we meet somebody, it’s a performance. Learning a character, working behind the bar, it all helps you understand people.”

Mark’s involvement did not begin quite as he’d planned: “I came down wanting to act because I’d done it at school, but stage fright got the better of me. I was nervous about starting again after so long so I got involved set building instead, helping Keith Crook.

“I also made a point of seeing every BP show I could. First was *Dad’s Army* - I thought the standard was so high.”

Nerves overcome, his on-stage debut came a few years later: “Keith Swainston was directing *Henry V* and looking for extras, so he said would I like to be in it? I was at the back as a soldier.”

A first speaking role followed when Sally Hull cast him in *Hi Di Hi*: “It was only one brief line but it felt like a big change because I hadn’t spoken on stage for nearly seven years. I had help from various cast members and Sally was very encouraging, giving me tips on things like how to project my voice.

“Then between 2011 and 2014 I was in every Christmas show, but I had to stop when I got my job at Sainsbury because the matinees clashed with busy weekend shifts.”

More recently he has been in *The Haunting*, *The Country Wife* and *One Man Two Guvvors*, where he earned one of the show’s biggest laughs as the unfortunate actor whose moment of glory is ruined by a humour-loving audience member. He is now rehearsing for *The Ghost Train*.

But Mark has always been ready to get involved wherever he might prove useful: “I started doing backstage work after I auditioned for *Faulty Towers* but didn’t get in. I always try to get involved in some way, so I approached David Lester. I did things like operate the rat on the table. And in 2010 I just had one of those moments - I thought I’d ask if I could help behind the bar. I just thought ‘why not’, and Maureen was very encouraging.

“Meeting people, going on stage and serving in the bar have helped my confidence. Acting helps with diction and

body language and, when I was unemployed, coming down here gave me a sense of purpose. I think if it wasn’t for here and the help I’ve had, I wouldn’t have got my job.”

Because of this, he is keen to encourage anyone unsure about getting involved: “I would say ‘just try it’. Everyone is so friendly, whether it’s acting, technical, working in the bar, set crew or box office. I know meeting new people can be nerve-wracking, but I learned a lot through being involved in the Bancroft Players.”

And his ambitions for the future? “I’ll see what happens. One day I hope to direct, in *The Studio*. I enjoy comedy, or serious plays with comic moments. And I’d like to see us do a science fiction play here.”

But first, he has a ghost train to catch.



*With Gareth Martin in ‘One Man Two Guvvors’ (left) and bar volunteering (right). Photos on this page by Paul Seaby and Julian Newman Turner.*

## Who's who in the Bancroft Players

### Executive Committee 2016 to 2017

Richard Whitmore  
*President Emeritus*

Frank Pratt  
*President*

Les Edwards  
*Chairman*

Susan Mellor  
*Secretary*

Tim Hallas  
*Treasurer*

Rory Reynolds  
*Artistic Director*

Nicki Pope  
*Production Manager  
(Main Theatre)*

David Lester  
*Production Manager  
(Studio)*

Chris Lane  
*Theatre Manager*

Julian Newman Turner  
*Business Manager*

David Borner  
*Committee Member*

Elliott Bunker  
*Committee Member*

Emma Saunders  
*Committee member*

Zara Schafer  
*Committee Member*

### Appointments 2016 to 2017

Vice-Chairman  
*Chris Lane*

Box Office Manager  
*Vacant*

Bar Committee  
*Frank Pratt, Roger Nobes*

Bar Rota  
*Maureen Nobes*

Bookings Manager  
*Edith Pratt (evening),  
Keith Crook (day)*

Diary Organiser  
*Keith Crook*

Fire Officer  
*Chris Lane*

First Aid Officer  
*Paula Downes*

Front of House Manager  
*Paula Downes*

Health & Safety  
Coordinator  
*David Hillelson*

Junior Theatre Group  
*Alison Hudson*

Keys Distributor  
*Keith Crook*

Licensing Manager  
*Tim Hallas*

Membership  
*Edith Pratt*

Newsletter  
*Rosemary Bianchi*

Properties  
*Audrey Hawkins,  
Julie Chamberlain*

Publicity Manager  
*Julian Newman Turner*

Refreshments/Stewards  
*Lyn Bryars, Mo Mutton*

Set & Design Manager  
*Rosemary Bianchi*

Technical Manager  
*Alan Bailes*

Workshop Coordinator  
*Clive Hall*

Wardrobe Liaison  
*Sally Hull*

Welfare  
*Vacant*

What's On Distribution  
*Susan Mellor*

Youth Theatre Group  
*Rory Reynolds*

200 Club  
*Paula Downes*

## Audition notice Pronoun

Josh and Isabella are childhood sweethearts. They were meant to spend their gap year together... but Isabella has now become a boy.

Pronoun is a love story for young actors about transition, testosterone and James Dean by Canadian-born playwright Evan Placey. The play predominantly explores the theme of gender, a potent topic in our modern world, through the journey of transition of Dean, a teenage transgender boy.

There is a requirement for seven actors and the character ages are between 15 and 18 years. Although there are adult characters in this play, these will be played by younger actors.

There are many characters in the play, which means that everyone other than Josh and Dean will have to multi-role. Therefore, there is nothing to prepare for this audition, but please come with an idea of which character you would like to audition for and the readiness to play others.

### THE ROLES:

**Dean:** 16, female actor. Dean is a girl (formerly Isabella) born into a boy's body. She is kind, confused, frustrated, the centre of our story and - most importantly - in love.

**Josh:** 16, male actor, Dean's ex-boyfriend. Loves Isabella more than anything in the world, but struggles to come to terms with the fact that she is a boy. And she's now calling herself Dean. Does this mean he's gay? This wasn't the way it was supposed to happen.

**Kyle:** 17, male actor, Josh's best friend. Just as confused as anyone and, to make it even more confusing, is getting married in a few months. Multi-roles as Dean's Mum.

## The Studio

### THE DETAILS:

**By:** Ewan Placey, directed by Barney Taylor

**Auditions:** Mon 27 and Wed 29 March.

**Performances:** Wed 7 to Sat 10 June

**Scripts:** Available from Box Office

**Further information:** Barney Taylor at [barnabyjstaylor@hotmail.com](mailto:barnabyjstaylor@hotmail.com)

## QMT bookings diary to go on website

The diary of room bookings will now be available on the QMT website. This will make checking which rooms are free, and which are booked out and to whom, much easier.

So if you have forgotten which room your rehearsal is in, or want to plan a schedule, this resource will be a great

help. Simply go to [qmt.org.uk](http://qmt.org.uk) and scroll to the members area. You can view the diary and/or print a hard copy.

The website diary will be updated as and when necessary e.g. when rehearsals are scheduled, and the printed copy on the main notice board

which shows the next few weeks will continue to be posted.

Edith emphasises that this is only for checking and that all bookings will still be made through her.

*Keith Crook*